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THE P A R I A H

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AUTHOR OF 'VICE VERSÂ' 'THE GIANT'S ROBE'
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THE PARIAH

BOOK I.

ANTIPATHY AND ATTRACTION

'Sie war lebenswürdig, und er liebte Sie; Er aber war nicht lebenswürdig, und Sie liebte Ihn nicht' (Altes Stück) HEINE

CHAPTER I.

ENGLISH EXCLUSIVENESS.

And curving a contumelious lip,
Gorgonised me from head to foot
With a stony British stare.—*Maud.*

It was the hottest hour of an afternoon in mid-August; the *plage* at Trouville was crowded, the great bathing function at its height.

Bathing-machines were lurching and jolting down to the water's edge; stout French gentlemen, striped red, white and blue, like cheap sweetstuff, were floundering in a couple of feet of water with the air of sea-lions; younger men were swimming out beyond the masts, or displaying their symmetry on the deck of their double-canoes; ladies in baggy blue tunics and trousers were clinging to the ropes and screaming with shrill ecstasy when a larger wave than usual knocked their oilskin caps together; on the sands there were gay tents, tricolour flags, giant umbrellas, under which the bathers received *en peignoir* or read their 'Gil Blas' and 'Petit Journal' between their dips.

To the British mind there is something irregular and almost improper in the idea of bathing in the afternoon, and the British constitution generally prefers to digest its mid-day meal under other conditions than seated on a straw chair, in a scorching sun, and on glaring white-hot sand, watching foreigners making more or less painful exhibitions of themselves.

And so, the Grand Hôtel Californie at Trouville being the establishment most in favour with English-speaking visitors, some

of these were generally to be found at this particular time upon a terrace opening out of the central salle of that hotel, and protected from the sun as far as possible by a great awning.

This afternoon, for some reason, the party was less numerous and representative than on others, consisting chiefly of Mr. and Mrs. Spoker, a young married couple, and Mr. Hiram P. Whipple, a reflective but uncommunicative American, with a withered wife and a brilliant daughter.

Conversation had followed its well-worn groove—abuse of the management, the hours, the wines, the cookery, the beds, the charges, for there are few travellers with souls so dead as to own themselves satisfied with anything at a foreign hotel, but all that could be said on these subjects had been said once more and a pause had followed, the reproach of which each seemed too lazy to remove, until Mr. Spoker, a light-eyelashed, foxy-faced young man, introduced a new subject.

‘If we’d had a little more energy, all of us,’ he remarked, ‘we might have been at Deauville races this afternoon; they ran a drag over from the hotel.’

‘Well,’ said Miss Magnolia Whipple, ‘if anything could make me hotter than I am it would be looking on at horse-racing on an afternoon like this; not that you could expect any horse to hurry—they won’t do more than stroll quietly along the course on the shady side.’

‘Of course,’ said Mr. Spoker, ‘these foreign meetings aren’t like the real thing—rather *playing* at racing.’

‘Now wouldn’t anyone think, to hear him talk, that he never missed a race when he’s at home?’ cried his wife, who charged herself with the duty of unmasking her husband’s harmless little affectations; ‘and yet I don’t believe he was ever even at the Derby more than once in his life—now, *were* you, Alfred? Ah, he won’t answer!’ she cried in high glee. ‘I’ve offended him. Never mind, Alfred, dear, you *do* know something about racing—he spotted the winning horse at the “Petits Chevaux” last night from the way it carried its tail—he won fourteen francs, which gives him a right to talk like a sportsman.’

‘As you lost them and a lot more in the course of the evening,’ retorted Mr. Spoker, ‘I should have thought it didn’t give you any right to talk at all.’

‘Should you, Alfred, really? Ah, well, you see your mistake now, dear. By the way,’ she broke off, ‘does anyone know what has become of Mrs. Chevening and her daughter? They generally sit out here for a little while. I wonder if they’ve gone to the races!’

‘Mrs. Chevening’s too real high-toned to go, unless it was on top of a four-in-hand with a few dukes around,’ drawled Miss Magnolia Whipple. ‘And there’s not much aristocracy at this hotel, only one Italian prince, and poppa took *him* for a waiter.’

‘Magnolia Whipple, you do dress things up beyond all!’ re-

monstrated her mother. 'Your father merely told him he must take two dollars off our bill; it was the hotel clerk he thought he was speaking to.'

'Well, and that wouldn't turn most princes' heads, I should think. But it was Mrs. Chevening we were talking of. Can anyone inform me what's the reason they have for thinking themselves just too select for anything, those two, particularly the girl? Why has she got that way of not seeming to have any use for most people? Who is she, anyway?'

'They belong to a good family—well connected and all that—related to Lord Yaverland,' said Mr. Spoker.

'Alfred, you are too funny when you talk Peerage, and you don't know anything about it yourself—only what she chose to tell you.'

'She's the widow of a colonel, isn't she?' said Miss Whipple, 'and not a live colonel at that. We don't think very much of that at home. And they don't seem to live in any style where they are, either. I don't see why they behave as if nothing and nobody was good enough for them.'

'Magnolia,' said her mother, 'you'll have people thinking you're jealous if you go on that way.'

'Mother's like the lady who was always telling her daughter to take her eyelashes out of tangle,' said Miss Magnolia with perfect serenity; 'but I'm not jealous—our styles are too distinct to clash. And I admire her, ever so much. I think she's too beautiful almost to live, and I'd just adore her if she'd let me—but she never has any time for me, and that makes me so mad with her. I don't like being made to feel no account every time!'

One or two of her male listeners seemed half conscious here that a complimentary speech of some sort was expected from them, but complimenting the pretty American in public was rather like riding at the quintain; any lack of adroitness was certain to result in a shower of chaff, so they deferred the venture to a more private occasion.

She had scarcely finished her sentence before one of the swing-doors which communicated with the central hall of the hotel opened, and the party was joined by the lady whose title to exclusiveness she had been calling in question.

Mrs. Chevening greeted the company with a smiling and comprehensive nod, not perhaps free from a suspicion of condescension, as she took one of the seats that had been placed at her disposal. She was a handsome woman, who moved and spoke with a languid grace that was mannered without being affected. In spite of the grey streaks in her luxuriant hair, and one or two lines traced by anxiety or worry on her brow and about her mouth, she looked some years younger than her actual age, which was forty-three. Her dress was what an English matron of means and position might be expected to wear at such a place, and certainly, even to a female eye, betrayed no signs of undue regard for economy.

'We've just been discussing some of the people at this hotel,' said Miss Magnolia audaciously.

'Oh,' said Mrs. Chevening, who did not approve of Miss Whipple; 'and were they really worth the trouble?'

'Well, we were wondering,' replied the young lady demurely.

'I can't say I have seen anyone as yet in whom I could feel the faintest interest,' continued the other. 'Trouville is so changed from what I remember it—such a very different class of people come here now.'

'Talking of queer people,' put in Mr. Spoker, who perhaps felt that the conversation was trenching on delicate ground, 'who's the man who goes about in a pith helmet—man who comes to *table d'hôte* in a light coat—looks like an Army man?'

'Not in the least like any Army man I ever met!' said Mrs. Chevening in the tone of an authority on the subject. 'He looks an odious person—they put him next to me at dinner last night.'

'Did you get any talk with him?'

'I? No, indeed! I am not so fond of talking to persons I know nothing about, so many people travel now who are quite too impossible; and this man may be a bootmaker or something dreadful of that kind at home, for anything one can tell.'

'If you really want to know all about him, Spoker,' said one of the men, 'old Liversedge is your man; lives in his part of the country, or knew him out in India or something—don't seem very intimate here though.'

'Mr. Liversedge knows something about everybody, it seems to me,' said Miss Magnolia; 'and it's never anything they'd be likely to put in their autobiographies either. It seems a little cooler now; the band will have begun at the Casino by this time; suppose we make a move;—won't you honour us, Mrs. Chevening?'

'You are very good,' was the reply, 'but I must find my daughter first. I thought she would have been out here.'

'She hasn't come near us since lunch. Seems as if she had found more interesting company somewhere,' said Miss Whipple, not without malice, as she prepared to descend with the rest of her party and cross the boarded sands to the Casino.

Meanwhile the wearer of the pith helmet—a covering which had procured him notice even at Trouville, where hats and caps incline to the fantastic—had been wandering disconsolately about the town. Earlier in the day he had attempted to take a bath, but failing to master the rather complicated preliminaries, he had got into a machine without any of the numerous tickets, and the *baigneur*, after vainly trying to inform him that he must go back and book his *cabane*, *peignoir*, *serviette*, and *costume*, by separate processes, and then present himself anew, was reduced to ordering him out of the machine in unmistakable pantomime; whereupon the Englishman had retreated under cover of a volley of Hindustani, and turned disgustedly up the nearest street. 'What was that fool in the red flannel driving at, I wonder,' he was thinking.

'I should have hoped I was respectable enough to be allowed to bathe in their beastly sea without producing my passport and certificate of birth, and the Lord knows what!'

The heat in the narrow streets was oppressive; the gutters exhaled a succession of odours that were not refreshing, the pavements were bare, for all the usual loiterers were away at Deauville; the proprietors of the shops where 'Articles de Paris' were sold were asleep in their muslined and mirrored back-parlours; the *dame du comptoir* at the confectioner's was dozing over her feuilleton; the waiters in the green-shuttered cafés were sleeping with their heads laid on the marble-topped tables. As the wanderer passed a private house where windows opened upon the street, he had a view of a gaudy little room, all ormolu and floral tapestry, with a stout bourgeois and his poodle slumbering peacefully on opposite armchairs. The only sounds that broke the hot stillness were the click of billiard balls, or rattle of dominoes from the upper rooms of restaurants, the drowsy tinkle of a *pension* piano, or the peevisish jingle of bells whenever one of the fly-horses on the place shook his long-suffering and sheepskinned head.

At the little circulating library where English was spoken, but not understood, yesterday's London papers had not yet come in. The Englishman had smoked all his own cigars and mistrusted, not unjustly, those produced under the fostering care of the French government. He was absolutely without resources, being one of those persons who soon exhaust the pleasure of novelty.

Walking idly along in that unenviable mood in which each change of direction seems more wearisome, Mr. Joshua Chadwick, as his name was, fell into a somewhat bitter and sombre train of thought.

'Upon my soul,' he was saying inwardly, 'for all the acquaintances I've made, or am likely to make in this hole, I might as well be back at one of the old Furredpore concerns at once—better, for I could do as I pleased there. It does seem an extraordinary thing that with so many English people at the hotel I haven't found a soul to speak to. They stuck me between a pair of Frenchmen at every *table d'hôte* except last night, and then I didn't get on much better, that woman with the grey hair wouldn't talk. I wonder if Liversedge has been telling them about me. It's likely enough. I was pretty short with him when he came up to me with some eye-wash or other about our being neighbours at Gorsecombe now, and hoping we should be friends. "If I wasn't good enough for you in Bengal," I said, "I'm not good enough for you here." I've never forgiven him that day he came to dine with me at the factory, and found a ryot—an obstinate old devil who wouldn't sow a single beegah of his fields in indigo—locked up in the go-down. Anybody else would have taken no notice, seeing he was my guest; but Liversedge had me up and fined me, and made me let the nigger out too. That was the last time he ever dined with me while he was in the district. But what could he say against me here? Only that I wasn't as steady as I might have been. Who was

there out there to care how I lived? Who will care now when I'm rich and turned respectable? Respectable! yes, I've got some object in keeping respectable now, for the boy's sake.'

Joshua Chadwick's career had been a singularly hard and unsuccessful one till quite lately. Twenty-two years before he was in his father's business with every prospect of a speedy partnership. Then he had committed the offence which had led to his expulsion; he had married one of the assistants employed in the establishment—an imprudence which the old man could not forgive.

Chadwick had gone out to Calcutta: his father's business lay in Oriental goods generally, and he expected that one of the banks there, with whom their house had dealings, might be inclined to help him, as proved to be the case.

The bank, like many Indian banks, owned silk and indigo factories in various districts, and to one of them young Chadwick was sent as assistant-manager. At that time he was rather of the type of 'good young man,' brought up in a strict Dissenting circle, an active Christian of a somewhat exuberant class,—energetic, emotional, fond of power. To be persecuted for doing right was gratifying; he went out with a light heart to make a home for his young wife, and gain riches in spite of the parental edict. He happened to reach the indigo plantation in the very height of the disputes between planters, ryots, and missionaries, and his avowed leaning to the latter did not make him more popular with his fellow-planters. He was not a man with any graces of manner, nor was he accustomed to society; he lived much to himself, and put by all that he could save from his salary towards the home he was planning. Then came the news which made him an altered man; his wife had died, leaving him with an infant son whom he had never seen. He grew morose and overbearing, fell out with his only friends, the missionaries, and presently became notorious for his high-handed dealings with the natives. Later, when he was transferred to a concern in another part of the country, he threw off every restraint and lived in a manner which made it impossible for married planters at all events to associate with him. He managed to save enough to buy a share in the factory; but the indigo interest in Bengal was slowly declining, and after long years of struggle against refractory ryots and bad seasons, Chadwick had been glad to sell out for what he could, and the Bank had helped him to purchase a factory in Behar, where the prospects of making a living were more favourable.

In Behar he had at last begun to prosper, but there, too, his life was no more reputable than before; his unsociable manners and irregular habits excluded him from such society as was to be had, and Chadwick was perfectly content to be so excluded.

All this time he had not heard from his father, and but rarely of his son, for whose support he had sent over small remittances from time to time, but the fact that he had cost his mother's life possibly

turned his heart against him from the first, for he felt no real interest in the boy.

At last he heard, through the Calcutta Bank, that his father was dead, and afterwards, to his utter astonishment, that he had relented and left his only son a half share in a very handsome fortune. Thereupon he had left his plantation to the care of an agent, and returned to his native land, with a sense that his altered position had brought new responsibilities, that he must leave sack and live cleanly in future. So far, however, neither his money nor his studious regard for the proprieties had procured him the footing he had expected in his native land. At Gorsecombe, the village in Pineshire, where his father had built himself a country house, he had not found himself at all cordially welcomed by the local society. Even here at Trouville, his fellow countrymen seemed to have combined to relegate him to the enjoyment of his own society. Once, in his reckless revolt against conventions, he would have been resigned enough, but the isolation one achieves is very different from that which is thrust upon one, and Chadwick resented being treated as an outsider in this way.

He did not make sufficient allowance for the natural suspicion and exclusiveness of the travelling Englishman, or the tendency of a clique when once formed to be chary of admitting others into its circle. And then, too, by a merciful law of nature which ordains that none of us can know exactly what impression we produce upon an unbiassed mind, he did not realise that his appearance was not in itself a recommendation.

Chadwick was a big man with a face coarsely and floridly coloured, bronzed by the sun, seamed and lined by hard living; he had strangely excitable-looking light-grey eyes, and a large, loose, sensual mouth; he was not positively ill-looking, nor was his expression bad, though to a fastidious sense there was something overpowering about the whole man which did not encourage advances.

'I suppose,' he said, continuing his meditations, 'I could find ways of passing my time at a place like this, if I chose to look about me—but there's the boy to be thought of now. I'll give the other thing a chance. Perhaps it's been my fault after all. I've been expecting other people to make up to me, instead of meeting them half-way myself. I'll go back to that hotel, and have another try.'

Strong in this new resolution, he struck up a little street under huge white calico banners advertising pianos for hire, and up between high walls and staring doll's-house-like villas, until he reached the *Hôtel Californie*, a large unbeautiful pile as architecturally characterless and pretentious as most hotels.

No one was in the big entrance hall except Mr. Liversedge, who was asleep on one of the divans, a couple of enormously stout foreigners, a husband and wife, who were sitting side by side on another, panting like over-driven cattle. Through the glass screen at the end he could see the heads of the group on the terrace out-

side. He looked a moment through the glass doors, and then his nerve failed him—it required more moral courage than he possessed just then in spite of his resolve to go out and sit amongst them, and risk an unmistakable snub by joining in the conversation.

‘I don’t feel up to tackling the lot of ’em,’ he thought, and went out again and round by a lower path to a terrace immediately under and out of sight of the balcony, where he might find an opportunity of cultivating the acquaintance of a solitary Briton.

On this terrace, which led up to the balcony or upper terrace by a double flight of steps and was laid out with shrubs and benches, Fortune favoured Mr. Chadwick even beyond his hopes, for, although there was no portly paterfamilias or sociable bachelor there, upon one of the seats sat a girl of about eighteen or nineteen, evidently English, and with something much more than the mere prettiness of youth and health. He remembered that she had sat on the other side of his unresponsive neighbour of the *table d’hôte*, who was probably her mother, and the mere facts that she was absorbed in a book and that he had not been in any way introduced were no reasons, with him, for not addressing her. If he could succeed in getting on good terms with her, he thought she would smooth his way for him with the rest of the English set; at any rate, it was worth trying, and so he drew up a chair, and sat by her bench for a minute or so in silence.

Miss Chevening’s face had disturbed the peace of mind of more than one who still found it as impossible to recall it accurately as to forget it. Her expression was constantly shifting with every change of feeling, like a child’s, and every change gave a new meaning and character to her features. Her hazel eyes could rest on you with the serenest and most mortifying indifference, or shine with a frank sweet friendliness that was a patent of distinction in itself for the recipient. Her beautiful flexible mouth had an habitual curve of slight disdain, her manner to people who did not interest her was apt to be curt, and to those who provoked her anger, merciless. She was impulsive and outspoken at times, particularly in her dislikes; she was fastidiously intolerant of commonplace, of boredom. At school she had been made the unwilling object of passionate homage from enthusiastic school-girls, and she had laughed at them pitilessly, though sometimes condescending to make use of their devotion. As yet, those who knew her best would have found it hard to say positively whether she had a heart or not, in the metaphorical sense of the word, if it had not been for the affection she showed for the younger members of her own family.

All this does not perhaps constitute a very lovable character, and it must be admitted that Miss Chevening’s virtues and amiability had never made her friends at all apprehensive of her early decease, but a lovely face and form atone for many shortcomings, and gain for their possessor a regard often as little deserved as sought,

Perhaps the past had done something to embitter her view of the world. She had been singularly beautiful from her childhood, and had always been accustomed to be made much of, especially at country-houses, where she frequently accompanied her father and mother on visits, and obtained a precocious knowledge of society.

She had been expensively educated at a fashionable watering-place school, and although Colonel Chevening had been ordered out to Afghanistan in the meanwhile, and was killed at Maiwand when Margot was sixteen, he left his widow fairly well off, and there seemed no reason why his daughters should not take their natural place in society when they were of an age to come out.

Unhappily, Mrs. Chevening, who was at once ambitious and extravagant, conceived the idea of increasing her income by speculation—with results that may be easily imagined. She had to give up her house in Chesham Place, and find another large enough for her family and at a rent suitable to her reduced means, and, tempted by its cheapness, she took one of the old houses which are to be found along the river bank between Chiswick and Hammer-smith. Perhaps she had expected that her friends would find her out there; or perhaps, in the first bitterness of her reverses, she had been glad of a retreat; at all events, she found herself deserted by all her former set. Chiswick was too long a drive for them, and they soon forgot, first her address and then her existence. Mrs. Chevening having chosen to take offence at a neglect which she might have expected, had made no effort to keep up her relations with her smart friends, and the consequence was that Margot, at a time when, had all gone well, she would have been presented to her Sovereign and launched into her first London season was living the life of any young lady of the middle-class who had never aspired to society.

Her devoted school-girl friends had come out and forgotten her: her aunt, Lady Yaverland, who had daughters of her own, considered her duty to her niece and sister-in-law sufficiently fulfilled by a card for an afternoon concert at Portman Square in the winter.

One or two families at Bedford Park or Kew, and in the sleepy old-world mansions which still resist the onset of modern bricks and mortar, formed their only acquaintances now; and Miss Chevening's social distractions were all of the mildest suburban order—a garden-party, the lawn tennis club in summer, a carpet-dance or two in winter.

As a rule she was something more than resigned; she liked the old-fashioned creeper-covered house by the river; she had been more closely drawn to her sisters and brother by their altered circumstances, and the best side of her nature was reserved for them, which is not invariably the case; but Margot had a proud conviction in the superiority of her own family.

Nevertheless there were times when she felt a vague discontent, when she longed for a larger horizon than the one which lay before

her. Memories still lingered of the days when the wheels of her life had run with luxurious smoothness; when, child as she was, she had been surrounded with flatteries and pleasures. She was as disposed for the pleasure now as then; she could not help knowing that she had an even better title to the homage, yet the world in which she had once thought to move knew her not, and probably would never know her.

It was this consciousness of being shut out from circles in which she was capable of shining, which gave her something of the bearing of a banished princess, who found everything in her meaner estate endurable but its pleasures.

This was the girl with whom Joshua Chadwick had somewhat rashly determined to ingratiate himself; and even he, though not a diffident man in most respects, seemed to feel that there was something rather formidable about the undertaking.

CHAPTER II.

BREAKING THE ICE.

At length Chadwick conquered his hesitation and began: 'I hope I'm not disturbing you, sitting here?' he said.

The girl on the bench lifted her eyes for a moment with a slight surprise, and then said indifferently, 'Not in the least,' and returned to her book.

'You seem interested in what you are reading?

'Very.' This time she did not raise her eyes.

'Might I inquire the subject?'

With a charming negligent gesture she held the book towards him so that he might read the title.

"Sesame and Lilies," eh? A work on Horticulture, I presume?'

'Yes,' said Miss Chevening, with a fine contempt for accuracy.

'Ah, the only plant I've had any experience of is indigo.'

She did not conceive herself called upon to return any answer to this.

'Yes,' he continued, 'I ought to know something about indigo. I've spent more than twenty years of my life trying to make a living out of it—hard work it was, too, and yet it doesn't seem such a bad time now to look back on. I miss it now I'm out of it all.'

He was silent for a moment; again he saw the coolies beating the blue-green liquid in the great vat to a milky froth, and smelt the pleasant fresh scent of the dye; for an instant he was back in the old life, with all its risks, contests, and hopes; an autocrat in his factory, a terror to villagers who shirked their sowing. Then the vision faded again, and he was only a friendless Englishman abroad, trying to induce a monosyllabic young woman to talk to him.

Her continued inattention exasperated him into saying, 'I should have thought it wouldn't have done you any harm to put down your book for a few minutes and be sociable; I'm not a great talker myself, but it does seem hard to have been here two days, with plenty of my fellow-countrymen about, and not a civil word from one of them all the time!'

She closed her book resignedly; she did not intend to let him drive her away, and she saw that, unconventional as his manners were, he did not mean to be offensive. Perhaps, after all, it might amuse her for a short while to let him talk; he was a new type, and at least he was not commonplace, like most people.

'I am quite willing to listen to you,' she said, 'if you have anything to say.'

'That's more than anyone else has been yet,' he answered. 'Why, the other day at *table d'hôte* I passed a man the salt, and he was so afraid of its leading to anything, that he said, "Mercy, m'sieu," knowing as well that I wasn't French as I did he was English. I call that small-minded, don't you?'

'Perhaps it was only shyness. Englishmen are rather noted for being reserved, aren't they?'

'I'm not reserved,' he said; 'if anyone wants to know who I am and what I am I'm quite willing to tell him. I've no reason for concealing it. But half the people you meet are so mortally afraid of compromising themselves by making acquaintances. There's one comfort, I shan't be lonely very long, my boy comes in a day or two, he'll be company for me.'

'Is he crossing from England, then?'

'No; he's been travelling about the Continent, and I thought I'd go over and meet him at one of these French seaside places, and we'd enjoy ourselves a bit together before we went back. My father didn't give me such opportunities when I was young; he was a hard man, turned me adrift for marrying against his wishes, and there was I, all the best years of my life, toiling to make more than a bare living out in Bengal. I couldn't do much for my son in those days—all the money I could spare went towards purchasing a share in a concern, or paying off loans or meeting losses. However, my father came round before he died, and I'm a rich man now and able to make it up to my boy. He's a good boy, too, and considering how short a time we've known one another, it's surprising how we've taken to each other. He'll want for nothing now. I'm a richer man than I ever hoped to be—a richer man than most down in our parts, and my son shall have a better time of it than I had.'

Most of Miss Chevening's interest had been exhausted by this time. Chadwick did not improve on acquaintance; she did not care to be the recipient of these sudden confidences, and found his rough swagger rather more trying than she had anticipated. She was distinctly relieved, therefore, to see her mother coming towards them from the upper terrace.

'So here you are, Margot!' exclaimed Mrs. Chevening. 'I have been looking for you everywhere.'

'Your daughter, ma'am,' said Chadwick, 'has been giving me the pleasure of her society down here.'

'Indeed?' she said coldly. 'Margot, I have brought you two letters from Littlehampton; they were lying on the portier's table as I came through.'

'Oh, at last!' cried Miss Chevening, all her languor suddenly becoming animation. 'Give them to me, please. . . . From Ida! Mother, look—two whole sheets; she must be really better!'

'Pray don't let us detain you here,' said Mrs. Chevening to Joshua Chadwick, who showed no inclination to go.

'You're not detaining *me*—I've only too much time on my hands,' he declared.

'Then I suppose it is we who must find some other place,' said Mrs. Chevening. 'Come, Margot.'

'Oh!' he said, clumsily, 'I'll go. I didn't know I was intruding; thought the hotel grounds were free to all. But I can easily go somewhere else, since I'm in the way here. Good afternoon.'

'What a terrible person!' murmured Mrs. Chevening, as she sat down by her daughter's side. 'You haven't really been allowing him to have any conversation with you, Margot, have you?'

'Ida drove to Worthing on Saturday, and wasn't in the least tired,' was the irrelevant reply.

'Dear pet—so glad! but you didn't hear my question, I think. Were you talking to that dreadful man?'

'Oh, a little,—yes. At least he talked to me—he told me things.'

'Margot, how very imprudent you are;—now we shall find it very difficult to make him keep his distance. What did he tell you?'

'They have been twice to Arundel,' Miss Chevening announced from her letter. 'Were you asking me something? Oh, well, he told me that he had been an indigo-planter, out in Bengal, I think he said. And about his son, who is coming to meet him here soon. And how he was immensely rich, and could buy anything he took a fancy to—he was very full of his wealth—and how no one here would speak to him, which he seemed to take to heart. I think that was about all.'

'He seems to have been very confidential,' said Mrs. Chevening, whose displeasure seemed to have already evaporated.

'I couldn't help it, dear. I don't think I was at all encouraging.'

'Well, tell me what Ida says.'

'I'll read you the end of her letter:—'

'"I can't tell you what a perfect time we are having here. Reggie and Lettie are running about on the sands all day, and have the most fearful appetites. You can't think how sweet dear Hennie has been all the time we have been here—really more like

a sister than a governess! I wish you liked her more than you do, because I think she feels that a good deal. I often think of you and wonder if you are enjoying yourselves—it must be such fun being in a big hotel; I suppose you have a dance every night almost? Be sure and tell me if you see anything very striking—in the costumes I mean, of course. Hennie has two lovely gowns, and looks quite pretty in them. One is a,—and so on—“Don’t you think my writing is getting like yours—it isn’t nearly so schcolgirly as it used to be, is it?”’

‘Miss Henderson seems to me much too fond of dress for a woman in her position,’ remarked Mrs. Chevening; ‘I shall really have to speak to her about it when we get home. You don’t care about her very much, do you, Margot?’

‘I think she’s rather silly in some things; but Ida’s devoted to her; she couldn’t bear to part with her now.’

‘I wish I could have afforded someone who was a little more—but we have to be so careful about what we spend now,’ sighed Mrs. Chevening.

‘You know I help as much as I can with the two younger ones,’ said Margot, ‘but I’ve no genius for teaching, and I don’t know nearly so much as Miss Henderson in most things. Reggie is quite beyond me. But I must read you Lettice’s epistle—she has a style which is all her own:—

“My dear beloved Margot,—We all like littlehampton excessively, it is the greediest place we have ever been to, and we have such glorius apétits. Reggie and I bild the most beutiful subteranean cavnus in the sand, for pírits. We have not seen a pírít yet to speak to, but there is a very plesant costgard along the cliffs. Reggie and I had afternoon tea with him yesterday in his cottage, and he showed us all his meddles—we are going again soon.”’ (‘I shall write to Miss Henderson, and beg her to be very careful where she allows those children to go,’ said Mrs. Chevening at this point. ‘I dare say she would draw the line at pirates,’ said Margot, laughing, ‘though I believe Lettice would go to tea with Captain Kidd himself if she was invited.’)

“Yarrow sends his love; he is very well. We have only just forgiven him for killing a little rabít. Reggie is taming the sweetest little teeny erab, he is going to train it to come when he calls, and to walk strate; he says he shall do it all by kindness. It can lie on its back and play at being dead so prettily, but we don’t know who tort it that. I have a lot of new drawings to show you. Some are Nativities and Anunciations, and some are mistical.”’ (‘What does the child mean?’ exclaimed her mother. ‘Didn’t you know?’ said Margot. ‘Lettice has been mad about the Old Masters ever since she was taken to the National Gallery; she imitates their subjects now in lead pencil, and would be dreadfully hurt if anyone thought they were funny. I never trust myself to do more than glance at them.’) “I have done a Masterdom of Saint Sibastion, which is the best I have ever done, and *very* good. The day before

yesterday Hennie and Ida went to Wurthing, so Reggie and I were left alone. We walked along the promenade and pretended we could see you and mother over in France waving hankychifs to us. Yesterday nothing hapened except the arival of a bun-loaf about tea-time. Reggie says he can't bother to write, so I'm to send an apolijy. Isn't my speling very much impruvd? Do come back soon. I think littlehampton must be ever so much more emusing than France is."

'Peebles for pleasure!' remarked Margot at Lettice's opinion on the comparative merits of France and Littlehampton. 'She is the quaintest darling. But Trouville really is beginning to pall a little, dear, don't you think? Mightn't we finish our holiday with them?'

'You are a most incomprehensible girl,' said Mrs. Chevening. 'I thought, after all the anxiety and worry of Ida's illness, it would be a pleasant change for you—this continental life—and you are tired of it already.'

'I am a little tired of the Californie, I think,' said Margot; 'the people are not very interesting, and we hardly ever go out of the hotel, do we?'

'I don't care about sight-seeing,' said Mrs. Chevening; 'and there is the Casino.'

'Oh, the Casino, yes!' replied Margot, with a little pout, for Mrs. Chevening, although she took out the full value of her sixty francs' *abonnement*, did not patronise any entertainment that could not be seen without extra payment. Margot would have liked to see more of the surrounding country, to visit some of the sleepy little towns and the old homely churches, where the walls were covered with tokens of naïve and often touching devotion, and votive ships hung from the dim rafters; but her mother's tastes did not lie in this direction, she was content to oscillate between the *plage* and the Casino, and seemed to find perfect satisfaction in the rather microscopic talk of the Spokers and Whipples and their set.

Mrs. Chevening had sent Margot up to make her preparations for the *table d'hôte*, and sat for a time absorbed in meditations which, to judge by her expression, were not of a cheerful character, and which, using an author's privilege, I may indicate more fully. 'It was a mistake to come here,' she was telling herself, 'a mere waste of money. If I had taken her to Whitby, or Cowes, or Folkestone, we should have met people worth knowing, some of my old set perhaps—but *here!* Yet how could I tell? The very best people go to Trouville some seasons, it only happens that this year they've chosen to stay away. Perhaps,' and here she broke into a bitter little smile, 'it would have made very little difference even if they were here. What young man with a name and position would look at a penniless girl, though she's as lovely as Margot? I was a fool to think of it, and yet it would break my heart if she were to marry some third-rate young actor or government clerk, and settle down for life in Bedford Park or Shepherd's Bush. She ought to

marry a rich man, if only for the sake of the other children. Oh, if poor dear Hamilton had only been spared, how different it all might have been! And Gwendolen, who might have brought her out and done everything for her, if she only would—but she's afraid of Margot interfering with her own girl's chances. I dare say not without reason, for all those Bradings are as plain as pestles. I wonder,' and here her thoughts were too disjointed and enigmatic to be capable of being put into words, but at the end of a long reverie she rose, and said aloud, 'Wasn't somebody saying that Mr. Liversedge knew all about him? It might be worth while finding out.'

Mr. Liversedge was an ex-civil servant who had been high up in the service, he was now a gossiping old bachelor with nothing to do but flutter about from one watering-place to another, and tell stories spiced with a *pot-pourri* of Eastern scandal. Cheltenham, Leamington, the Riviera, and the Oriental Club knew him well, and now he had come to Trouville with his hoary head and his hoarier stories, to see whether 'the fleeting remnant of his liver' would be benefited by Norman air. He spent most of his evenings in playing an Indian variety of 'Patience' in the *salon de lecture*, and would occasionally offer to instruct the prettiest married woman (for he had a wholesome dread of girls and widows) in the mysteries of the game. He had rather mistrusted Mrs. Chevening at first, and had been careful to parade his anti-nuptial opinions, but his alarm had now abated. She found him stretched at full length on a divan in the hall, waiting for the dinner gong, and he was easily induced to tell her all he knew about the stranger in the pith helmet.

'Curious,' he said, 'how the fellows you don't care to meet *will* crop up at the most unlikely places. I knew this Chadwick soon after I joined my first appointment. He was managing a factory in my division, and I was brought in contact with him occasionally. He was the only planter about there I didn't get on with—violent, overbearing fellow—not a man you could know at all. I dare say he was soured by the way he'd been treated. Father had those big shops in Wigmore Street—Oriental warehouses—carpets, Indian wares, *you know 'em*. Well, this man fell in love with one of the young ladies in the establishment and married her. The old man was a very strict and proper old gentleman with great ideas of class distinctions, so he turned his son out of the business, out of the home, and country too, for marrying beneath him. The wife died soon after, before she could come out and join her husband, and after that he didn't seem to care what he did. I had some trouble with him, and we were very stand-off for some time. I got a collectorship in the Moorshedabad district, flattered myself I'd seen the last of him. Not a bit of it, he turned up as planter then on his own account—quieter, I must say, but still—well, he didn't care to make himself popular with the people there. I got transferred again, and—well, to make a long story short, I retired about two years ago, and after wandering about a little, settled down at Gorsecombe, and whom do I find there but this identical man! It appears

the old Chadwick, after living for years over his place of business, suddenly took it into his head to build a house for himself in the country. When he died he left the house and half his property, a half share in the business, which they tell me represents an enormous sum—he left all this to our friend, who naturally allowed his indigo to look after itself and came over to his new kingdom—and here he is, worth, well—a good many more lacs than I shall ever be!’

‘And has he no family?’ asked Mrs. Chevening, ‘no one to share all this good fortune?’

‘One son,’ said Liversedge. ‘I never happened to come across him while I was at the Bungalow—my place at Gorsecombe—but he must be a fine young fellow by this time. I forget whether I heard that the old grandfather took him up and had him educated or not.’

‘Very likely,’ said Mrs. Chevening; ‘it would be the least he could do. But how very odd that you should go on meeting this Mr. Chadwick like that.’

‘Even here, you see, I’ve not escaped him—went out day before yesterday, and the first thing I saw was his confounded old sun-helmet! However, I keep out of his way. I don’t want to have more than I can help to do with the man.’

‘Well,’ said Mrs. Chevening, ‘I don’t know whether it is the way you have told the story, but, do you know, *I* feel quite interested in him, poor man!’

How nearly, she mused, she had thrown away what for anything she knew, might prove the very opportunity she was in search of! To think that she had been discouraging advances from a wealthy planter, with an only son who was expected to arrive shortly! How unwise it was, how wrong, indeed, to be governed by first impressions. The father was not prepossessing, it was true, but it did not at all follow that his son would resemble him. On the contrary, it was likely enough that he would possess an education and accomplishments suitable to his expectations. And if this young man were to make Margot’s acquaintance, might not the happiest results be expected? It was a chance at all events, and one she could not afford to neglect; at whatever sacrifice to her private feelings, this Mr. Chadwick must be cultivated. Had she gone too far to make this possible now? She remembered the man’s loneliness, his evident desire for companionship of some sort—no, it would not be difficult to conciliate him. But it must be done without delay, if she waited until the son appeared, it might be too late. It was an unpleasant necessity, especially after the opinions she had pronounced, but that could not be helped. ‘So long as it turns out well,’ she concluded, ‘what need I care what the people here choose to think!’

And, as a preliminary measure, she set herself deliberately to forget all that she had said and thought which was at variance with her new departure,—such act of oblivion being a mental fact that no renegade can safely omit.

CHAPTER III.

A HIGH-HANDED PROCEEDING.

'I THINK your manner is a little too inclined to be forbidding, Margot,' remarked her mother as they were walking down to the Casino later in the evening; 'it is almost as serious a mistake for a young girl to make as the opposite extreme—it really is!'

'What have I done now, dear?' inquired Miss Chevening, with lifted eyebrows.

'Well, you were so very "snubby" to that poor Mr. Chadwick at *table d'hôte*, I really felt bound to make some amends to him.'

'Is Mr. Chadwick the horrid man who would talk to me down on the terrace?'

'We have no right to condemn any fellow-creature as horrid on so slight an acquaintance,' enunciated Mrs. Chevening. 'I often think we miss making many pleasant and valuable friendships, Margot, simply because we will be so exclusive.'

'I thought I was so imprudent to encourage him—not that I ever dreamed of such a thing—a little time ago!'

'That is very different. I knew nothing of him then. I like him, Margot; I *quite* like him. Of course one sees he is not just like other people, but a little unconventionality is so refreshing. And he seems so lonely here, it is only kind to take some notice of him.'

'Well, you will see,' predicted Miss Chevening; 'you have raised him, dear, but you won't find it so easy to lay him again—we shall be always seeing that dreadful helmet bearing down on us now.'

'I think,' said her mother with great dignity, 'you may trust me to check any encroachment, and, let me tell you, it is the worst possible style to adopt that contemptuous tone. We are all made of the same flesh, remember, all erring mortals—here to-day and gone to-morrow.'

'Ah, but he *won't* be gone to-morrow,' said Margot, who did not relish the moralising turn of the conversation; he's waiting for his son.'

'Did he tell you what the son was doing!' said Mrs. Chevening, 'travelling about Normandy, seeing all the old towns and great cathedrals—such a nice thing for a young man to care about—seeing cathedrals—I think. Shows such refined tastes. But then he has seen so little of his father all these years.'

'You evidently think that accounts for it,' remarked Miss Chevening maliciously.

'I did not say anything of the kind. Mr. Chadwick is a very pleasant person in his way, but his son is likely to have had more

advantages in education and training—one so often sees that. He seems such an affectionate father too.'

'Is the son married as well, then?' said Margot, who happened to be in a provoking mood.

'You are a little dull to-night, dear,—or is it only inattentive? Married! Why, he is quite a boy, twenty-one or so.'

'Boys of twenty-one or so do marry,' said Margot.

'Well, this one is *unmarried*, and I was of course speaking of the father; he is very proud of his son, Margot, I could see.'

'Is he?' was all Miss Margot could be induced to reply, and the conversation dropped. Nevertheless she retained an unpleasant impression of that *table d'hôte*; it had both puzzled and pained her that her mother's treatment of the obnoxious Mr. Chadwick should have undergone so marked a change. She was angry, too, at the complacency with which Mrs. Chevening's advances had been met, and the sudden and alarming development from a mere *table d'hôte* conversation to an established acquaintanceship. Mrs. Chevening, of course, had made no allusion to her recent frigidity, striving rather to render it speedily forgotten, and she had been only too successful. Margot's pride was sorely wounded that her mother had so compromised her dignity, and though she was at a loss to guess her motive, she knew instinctively that it was very far from being mere good nature or compassion.

Her presentiment that Mr. Chadwick would follow up the advantage was amply fulfilled; he stuck to them during the next few days with a persistency that was almost pathetic, they could go nowhere without the certainty of his turning up at some unexpected point, and, much as Margot chafed under the infliction, her mother endured and even encouraged it.

Under her ægis he gained admission into the English set at the Californie, and his social quarantine was ended, but he attached himself chiefly to Mrs. Chevening, which had the effect of throwing Margot very much upon her own society.

It was on the third day of this unaccountable friendship that her mother said, 'Margot, Mr. Chadwick is very anxious that we should go over to Deauville Races with him to-morrow, it's the last day, and he is expecting his son this evening, so we shall be a party of four.'

'No, mother, really,' she protested; 'I don't in the least want to go—you must leave me out.'

'Don't be childish, Margot—*selfish* I should say—for if *you* won't go, I must stay here with you of course.'

'I don't see why—but surely a whole afternoon without Mr. Chadwick's companionship will be a little half-holiday for us? I know it will be so for me.'

'It was most good-natured of him to wish us to come with him, and I can't hurt his feelings by refusing. Besides, I have promised for you.'

'I wish you would tell me what there is about Mr. Chadwick

that you should encourage him as you do—he seems to me a rather objectionable person. Surely, mother, you must feel that he isn't—well, quite our equal in some ways?'

'I detest that way of speaking,' said Mrs. Chevening sharply. 'Are you aware that we are little better than paupers?'

'We are not too poor to choose our acquaintances surely. I own to preferring people who have an average amount of refinement. You are generally more exacting than I am.'

'You choose to look down on poor Mr. Chadwick because he has not acquired a mere varnish of manner—you forget that he has spent his life under great disadvantages, Margot, and I see nothing so very unpresentable about him after all. But you need not see more of him than you wish to-morrow, his son will be there to amuse you.'

'If he is at all like his father, he will not amuse me. Oh, mother, can't you see that I would very much rather stay at home!'

'I confess I don't understand you. I should have thought a girl, especially one who has had so few pleasures as you have, would be glad enough to go, for the mere spectacle.'

Margot allowed this remark to pass in silence, though there was the least little curl of disdain at the corners of her full lips which sufficiently indicated her thoughts.

It was a chilly evening, and they were taking their after-dinner coffee in the big entrance hall instead of upon the terrace as usual. For once they were alone together; Mr. and Mrs. Spoker were rocking on two American chairs side by side at some distance, bickering languidly; Mr. Whipple and Mr. Chadwick were smoking on the terrace below with turned up collars; Mr. Liversedge, stretched at full length on one of the divans opposite the Chevenings was engrossed in the workings of his digestive organs, and the rest of their set were scattered in various directions about the hotel. The foreign element was represented by the stout couple who had scarcely breath enough for respiration and none at all to devote to conversational purposes, and by one dejected stranger who was pacing monotonously up and down the matting.

'Don't you think we might be going down to the Casino?' said Margot at last; 'they are at least awake there.'

Mrs. Chevening assented, and they were about to go up for hats and wraps, when the sharp jingle of grelots was heard outside, and immediately afterwards the great black and red omnibus of the hotel drew up to the entrance, its lamps blazing in the dusk.

The gold-laced porter came out of his lair on one side, the dignified manageress left her bureau on the other, and prepared to receive the latest arrivals.

'Wait one moment,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'I must see who have come, and if they look as if they would be at all nice.'

There was only one passenger in the omnibus, and Margot could see him distinctly from where she was sitting near the bureau. He

was an Englishman evidently, and young; a tall, broad-shouldered fellow, with close-cut curling dark hair, and strong, rather stern features, a very favourable specimen of the young Englishman whom a public school and university training has turned out well both mentally and physically.

'Mr. Chadwick on the terrace?' she heard him say. 'Very well, if you'll have my things taken up to my room, I'll go and find him at once.'

He passed close to her with a brisk, easy step, and her eyes followed him involuntarily, though he did not appear to have noticed her. Where had he gained that air of mingled power and refinement? How did it come that plebeian-looking Mr. Chadwick had a son like that? It upset Miss Chevening's views on descent, which were of a decidedly conservative cast; he must have inherited his features and bearing from the mother's side, she concluded.

'I wonder,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'if that young man could have been the son Mr. Chadwick is expecting.'

'Which young man?' was the hypocritical rejoinder; evidently Mrs. Chevening had not overheard him inquiring for Mr. Chadwick, and Margot did not choose to enlighten her. But later in the evening, as they were leaving the concert-room at the Casino, she said, 'I suppose, after all, I had better go with you to Deauville to-morrow, mother. I couldn't let you go alone very well.'

'I was sure you would be sensible about it, my love,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'and you will see you will have a very pleasant afternoon, if you only make up your mind to enjoy yourself.'

Margot smiled to herself; she was feeling tolerably certain that she would have no reason to complain of boredom.

She stood some time at her open window that evening, looking down on the wide crescent of lights along the *plage*, with the green and red lanterns of the lighthouses on the pier and the electric haze above the Casino, and it seemed as if the place were invested with a new beauty for her, and she felt a dreamy pleasure in listening for the long, languid roll of the waves as they broke below in the silence. She did not care to analyse the causes for this change; she despised school-girl sentiment, and would have felt something like shame in admitting that a passing glimpse of a stranger could account for this difference, but nevertheless she found herself dwelling with a vague anticipation upon the fact that she would meet him on the morrow, and the probability that she would see him rather frequently during the next few days. There was something in his face which had interested her at once; he looked older by some years than the age her mother had mentioned, an age at which many are still raw and undeveloped boys. Margot had met many of these latter at tennis parties and dances, and never cared to perceive their open admiration, but already she was anxious that this acquaintance who was to be should not be totally indifferent to her. Her former antipathy to his father seemed unreasonable, she was grateful to him for his perseverance in cultivating them, and to her mother for her absence

of prejudice in suffering him. Had her own wishes prevailed she would now have lost all chance of knowing the only man for whose acquaintance she felt the slightest desire.

She awoke early next morning with the same vague sense that something not disagreeable was about to happen. The day promised to be a very hot one; as she looked out she saw a veil of pearly mist receding from the waveless sea; a fishing-smack with a sky-blue mainsail and red-ochre jib, repeated vividly in the glassy water, had just been towed to the head of the jetty by a string of fisherwomen, and was gliding gently out to sea. The sands were almost bare as yet, though the boarded promenade rang with the tramp of a few early risers. She felt impatient to be out too, and about an hour later, after the coffee and *petit-pain* which form one of the little luxuries of continental life, Margot was on her way across the planks, intending to walk through the market while the morning was cool. She was used to going about alone, and indeed would have had no chance of obtaining the exercise she loved if she had waited for her mother to accompany her. As she walked on, feeling an increased exhilaration with every breath of the pure morning air, she became a witness of a little scene which roused her to sudden anger.

Immediately in front of her was a small French boy, all striped collar and brown legs, who was being towed along with little vicious jerks by his nurse, not a *bonne* but a maiden from London who had been engaged, no doubt, in order that the young gentleman might acquire an English accent of the utmost purity.

He was enjoying the fullest opportunities just then of extending his vocabulary, and Margot could hear her shrill rating some yards away. 'Oh, yes, indeed, it's likely, ain't it, as I'm gowin' wherever *you* please, my lord? All the world's got to give way to a little grizzlin' bag o' bones, like you, is it? Well, *I* ain't goin' to be at your beek and eall, and so I tell you—you'll just go wherever *I* want you to, and so you'd better make up your mind to it—jear me?'

'Good Maman said I may go attrapp the little crevettes and écrevisses, Suzanne.'

'Oh, I dessay—but you won't trapp no crevats nor yet no creviees to-day, so don't you put yourself out expectin' it. I've trouble enough with you as it is, without your messin' about with rocks and pools, I can tell yer. You come and sit quiet on the sands along o' me, and don't let me have none o' your contrariness, or I'll make you remember it when I gets you 'ome, so now.'

'You are not good for me, Suzanne. And when Maman comes, I shall tell it to her how you are not gentille du tout du tout!'

'Tell tiles, will yer? Let me catch you making complynts against me, that's all—yer nasty little disagribble himp, yer!' And at this the nurse shook him violently.

Now one of Miss Chevening's characteristics was a caste prejudice which, though seldom exhibited, was almost as deeply rooted as

a Brahmin's. She was never arrogant to dependents, but she looked upon them as a separate and inferior order, created for the convenience of their superiors, and this girl's coarse tyranny seemed to her an intolerable piece of presumption. She quickened her pace, and stopped the nurse imperiously. 'How dare you speak in that insolent manner?' she demanded.

She looked magnificent as she stood there, her brows drawn to a line above her great hazel eyes, and a brighter flush staining her cheeks. The small boy glanced up at her in awe and admiration, as at some beautiful but hot-tempered angel who had flown down impulsively to protect him.

The nurse was less likely to be impressed by Margot's appearance, and tossed her head, remarking pertly, that she supposed she was not under any obligation to account for what she said to strangers.

'You are under an obligation to treat your master's child in a proper manner,' said Margot.

Susan belonged to a type of nursemaid which is still not uncommon in London, as a stroll through Kensington Gardens may convince the sceptical at any time. Violent-tempered, coarse in grain, with no understanding of, if no actual dislike to, children, she treated a charge exactly as she might the little brother Johnny or Billy she had dragged about the gutter in earlier days; her affection was as violent as her abuse, and she would have thought herself lowered by the least concession to a child's wishes. In appearance she was by no means a bad-looking girl, with reddish hair, a hot-tempered expression, and a figure which, though not short, was clumsy.

'It's likely as I'm to be made a slave of by a baby like that!' she cried.

'It did not seem as if you were the slave from the way you were talking,' said Miss Chevening with her haughtiest air. 'You were certainly not engaged to make a slave of him.'

'Whatever I was engaged for, I don't require to be taught my duties by you, miss,' said Susan. 'Come along, Master Onree, and don't let's take no notice o' what she says.'

'You had better listen,' said Miss Chevening, 'and you had better be civil. I am not at all sure that I ought not to find out who your mistress is, and let her know how her son is treated.'

Miss Susan's light eyes had no very pleasant look in them. At this threat, not being aware that the speaker was the very last person to execute it, she was subdued for the moment, however, and muttered something about trying to do her duty, and hoping the young lady would not make mischief.

'That will do,' said Margot. 'Little boy, what is your name?'

The little boy, apparently dazzled by the lovely imperious face that was bent down to his, made a little shrinking movement towards his nurse.

'He don't take to strangers, miss,' said Susan; 'there, Onree, the young lady ain't cross with you, only with poor Nana.'

'Listen, Henri,' said Margot in French, 'if you want to go shrimping, you shall; you shall come and catch crevettes with me,' and she held out her firm slim hand to be taken. What induced her to make this sudden proposition she could not have told; whether it was good nature, or a perverse determination to conquer the boy's affections, or the desire to teach this girl a lesson, or all three combined.

'I'm not going to trust that child out of my sight to please nobody,' declared Susan, who had caught the tenor of the words.

'I shall not ill-treat him at all events,' replied Margot, 'but you can follow us if you choose. Henri, you have a right to do what your mamma has given permission for. Susan is only your servant, do you understand? You mustn't be a little chicken of a boy. Have you got your net? Very well, then, now we'll start.'

This little episode had an unseen hearer, for it had taken place on the edge of the planks near a small bathing shed, beside which sat a young man, who could scarcely have avoided hearing all that passed unless he had chosen to rise from his chair and walk away—which, as the conversation was not of a private nature and amused him, he saw no necessity to do.

The speakers themselves, however, were invisible to him and he to them, and as their voices died away he had the curiosity to get up and look after the figures that were moving towards the rocks.

The girl's voice—sweet, high-bred, and high-spirited—had impressed him strongly; the distant glimpse he had of a slender tall figure appealed still further to his imagination; he wished he had been able to see her face. Long after he had returned to his chair he was absorbed in speculation as to what she would be like, whether he should be able to recognise her if they met, and other equally profitable subjects.

At last he could stay where he was no longer. 'They must have got past the Roches Noires by this time,' he mused; 'is the tide coming in or going out?' He went up to one of the slates which give such information—"Haute Marée, 10.45 A.M.," he read: 'it's past ten now. I wonder if they know that? if not, this is an awkward coast to be caught in. Suppose I stroll that way—it can do no harm at all events.'

Miss Chevening had not gone very far with her small *protégé* before she found herself wondering what had possessed her to take charge of him, and wishing very heartily that she had left him to his own devices. Her fondness for children's society was largely dependent upon their ability to entertain her; little Henri seemed still mistrustful of her intentions towards him, which annoyed her, and, unlike French boys in general, he was painfully, obstinately shy. They reached the Black Rocks, where tiny crabs, apple-green, olive, and orange, scuttled across the ribbed sand with the air of persons late for an important appointment, but Henri showed

no anxiety to capture one, making way for them to pass, on the contrary, with courtesy. 'Faites attention, Mademoiselle,' he would cry, and squeeze her hand tightly, while the shrimps, pellucid grey things that shot about in the pools or buried themselves in the sand, caused him a very languid excitement.

'Regardez-moi ces petites bêtes-là!' he exclaimed, and even suggested, 'Dis donc, si nous poussions ici le filet?' but nothing would induce him to handle them when they were hopping in the net—'like jerky little wet ghosts,' as Margot mentally likened them.

'You seem rather afraid of shrimps,' she remarked at last, 'now you have come out to hunt them.'

'They are damp, and they skip à faire peur!' he complained; 'they are ugly.'

'The crabs are pretty, at all events, she said. 'See if you can catch one, and bring it to me to look at.' He ran after one, but soon dropped it in dismay. 'It is not pretty—it pinches,' he announced with an injured expression.

'I think if I were you, Henri, I would hunt only shells—they are quieter and not so dangerous, you know.'

'Yes,' he agreed, much relieved; 'and they are really pretty. I will hunt shells.'

Margot began to find him wearisome. Susan, too, was a vexation to her, she stalked behind like a dismounted Black Care, in a sulk which was sighted for a long range. Miss Chevening ignored her entirely, but she could not help being aware that she was there, and noticing the propitiatory backward glances of her companion.

She exerted herself afresh to engage the boy's attention, for her self-love was concerned, but he would not be won, and she grew disgusted at last.

'It is not very polite of you, young man,' she said, 'to keep turning from me to look at Susan!'

'But she weeps!'

'Fiddle-de-dee!' said Margot; 'I forget the French for that—but Susan isn't weeping, and what if she were?'

'She is angry at me that I leave her, I am sure of it.'

'I believe you rather like being bullied after all. I want to make you stick up for yourself—do you understand that in English?—no, of course you don't. Remember this, you are a little gentleman and Susan is a servant; her anger—unless you are naughty (and you are too much of a little sheep ever to be that,' said Margot, privately)—'her anger is nothing to you. Do you see?'

But he didn't see; he knew better than Margot that his nurse's temper made a considerable difference to his comfort. 'Let me run and tell her that I love her well.'

'Ah, I think you had better go back to her altogether—you are a very nicely behaved little boy, but, do you know, you are not amusing? so I'll give you up to your lawful guardian.' And she

stopped for that injured person to come up, who, seeing that she was being waited for, lingered ostentatiously, with a show of deep interest in the horizon.

'Susan,' said Miss Chevening, carrying off her sense of defeat as well as she might, 'Master Henri thinks he would like to go back now, so perhaps you will have the goodness to go with him, and treat him more kindly in future.'

But the child spoilt the whole effect of this admonition by running to the nurse and pulling her hand in his impatience to be gone—a fact of which Miss Susan was not slow to take advantage. 'He knows who his friends are, you see, miss,' she said; 'you don't go down with him for all your high and mightiness, he's only frightened of you. Never mind, Onree dear, the cross young lady shan't have you—we'll leave her to herself.'

Margot did not deign to make any reply; she turned and continued her walk along the shore towards Villerville; she was angry at her failure, and a little downcast too, but the salt air soon restored her serenity, as she went swiftly on, with her eyes on the line of white specks just visible above the curved dark blue sea, a line which was all there was to indicate the port of Havre.

Gradually she became aware of footsteps behind which seemed hurrying to overtake her. Glancing up at the low brown and green cliffs on her right, she saw no cabin or path in sight, but was too proud to look round or betray any alarm at being followed in such a lonely spot: she had not heard that Trouville sands were at all frequented by footpads, but she was not quite comfortable notwithstanding.

'I had better face him, whatever he is,' she decided, and turned suddenly, when she found herself in the presence of the young man who had attracted her notice the night before. She was angry that he should have thought fit to force himself upon her like this, and her face expressed its most chilling surprise.

'I am afraid you think me very officious,' he said, 'but it struck me that you might not know that the tide is coming in.'

She was instantly reassured by his manner, which was merely that of a man who had put some pressure on himself to hazard a caution. 'You mean I ought to turn back?' she said.

'Of course,' he said, 'I don't know how soon you wish to get back, but it is a long way up the cliff and round by the road, and unless you turn at once you won't be able to go back along the shore without having some rather awkward rocks to climb.'

She thanked him and turned. 'But how are you going to manage,' she asked, as he seemed about to pass on.

'Oh,' he said, 'I shall find a path up the cliff somewhere.'

'I couldn't let you do that very well,' she said, 'after you have come all this way to warn me; you would get back late then. And besides,' she added, 'I might find it difficult to get round the Point alone.'

'I shall be very pleased to go back with you if you will allow me.'

She was not at all sure that she ought to have suggested it, but after all, as she told herself, she knew who he was, he had behaved very nicely, and if the tide reached the rocks round the Point before she did she would certainly be glad of some help.

‘Then I think you had better come,’ she said carelessly.

CHAPTER IV.

YOUNG MR. CHADWICK.

So he walked on by her side, a privilege which he had certainly not counted upon but had obtained in a perfectly legitimate way, since the risk, if slight, was real enough. He was a little dazzled, notwithstanding, now that he had seen her; he had expected beauty of the haughty aquiline type—this girl’s spirited petulant profile was almost childish in its outline save for the rather ironical curve of the firm mouth, and the decision of the perfect chin. There was a frank directness, too, in her manner, a calm unconsciousness which gave her a singular charm; she struck him as a piquant combination of inconsistent qualities.

‘Your small French friend soon got tired of his shrimping,’ he began, by way of opening a conversation.

Her eyes expanded. ‘How did you come to know anything about that?’ she inquired.

He decided upon perfect frankness, though he wished now that he had chosen any other topic. ‘I happened to be close by when you rescued him from his nurse’s clutches,’ he said.

His grey eyes had a subdued twinkle in them, with which she vainly tried to feel offended. ‘I can’t think what made me do it,’ she said, ‘it must have seemed perfectly absurd.’

‘It was rather a high-handed proceeding, perhaps,’ he admitted, ‘but, if you will let me tell you so, I thought it was very kind of you to take the child’s part like that.’

‘To tell you the truth,’ she said, ‘I didn’t think about the child at all, it was that woman’s insolence which annoyed me so. I could not resist putting her down.’

‘You gave the small boy a happy morning, at all events,’ he said.

‘I have not even that consolation,’ she replied, with a little sardonic grimace. ‘I don’t know which of us was more relieved when we parted.’

‘And do you think he’ll be better treated in future?’

‘I really don’t know. Probably not. I can’t say I feel very much interest—it was such a whining little animal!’

For the moment he felt slightly repelled—there was something rather heartless in this indifference of hers.

‘Does that seem strange?’ she added, laughing, ‘after interfering

as I did. But I didn't know then that he would look upon me as a kind of ogress, and be longing to get back to his tyrant all the time. I shall not rescue any more little boys. Don't let us talk about him any more. Do you know whether the races will be worth seeing this afternoon ?'

'I really have no idea. Why ? Are you going ?

'I dare say several people at the Californie will go,' said Margot, 'and I believe we shall make up a party.' She would not betray that she knew who he was, and he evidently was not aware as yet of the proposed expedition.

'The Californie,' he said, 'that is my hotel.' Miss Chevening was grateful to him for sparing her any *phrases de coiffeur* on this coincidence. 'I arrived alone last night. I had a friend, but he got out at one of the stations after a delay of 20 minutes to know how much longer the train was going to stop, and while he was busy making inquiry at the buffet, the train satisfied his curiosity by going on without him.'

Margot laughed. 'And is he there still ?' she inquired.

'Oh no, he came on by a later train without any further mishaps, rather to my surprise, for he does not speak with tongues very fluently, and I quite expected to hear of him turning up at Paris or Lyons or Marseilles, or somewhere.'

It struck Margot that there was a certain repressed contempt in his manner of speaking of this friend.

'You were travelling companions till then, I suppose,' she said ; 'was it pleasant ?'

'Pleasant ? Oh well, yes. I suppose so—as pleasant as could be expected,' he said, rather dryly.

'You don't care much for the Continent ?'

'Oh yes, I do, only in this case—well, I'm glad it is over, it was rather collar-work, and I did not quite know what I was letting myself in for when I agreed to go with him. But I've no right to bore you with all this.'

He was not boring her by any means ; she liked his cool manner, and the very tones of his voice were pleasant to her ear ; there was no effort or affectation about him ; he did not pose or fall into the ordinary young man's mistake of trying to be brilliant, but he gave her the impression of a cultivated and rather fastidious nature, whose friendship once gained could be depended upon. The more she saw of him, the greater grew her wonder that he could have sprung from such a parentage.

And so, before the walk was over, they were talking gaily and intimately, more like old friends than a couple whose acquaintanceship had been made in a highly irregular manner during the last twenty minutes.

'Here we are at the sea-wall,' he said at last ; 'and I hope you won't accuse me of being an alarmist—another five minutes, and we should certainly have had to climb for it.'

'As it is, we have not even got our feet wet,' said Margot ; 'I

almost wish we had had a little more excitement. But for one thing I am deeply grateful—that the tide didn't come up while I was with that little French boy and his nurse—I should have felt so very foolish.'

Privately he thought this a rather egotistic view of the consequences. 'Yes,' she continued, 'I can fancy how that nurse would have played Job's comforter, and how that little boy would have let himself drown on purpose. I do hate being humiliated!'

'I suppose,' he said, 'we none of us exactly revel in it.'

'I detest it more than most people,' she declared. 'I would do almost anything rather than have to confess myself in the wrong.'

He laughed. 'That is a very amiable trait in you,' he observed.

'I suppose I am not amiable,' she remarked calmly, 'so perhaps it is better to warn you at once.'

'I should be more alarmed, I dare say, if I had any prospect of finding out how far the warning was justified,' he said lightly; 'but I scarcely think I shall have an opportunity of discovering even that in the time I am here.'

Amiable or not, he was thinking, it would be difficult for her to do or say anything which would quite destroy her charm; very probably she was right in what she said of herself; in fact, he had already arrived at very much the same conclusion from what he had seen and heard. Wilful and ungracious and even heartless she might be, but that would not prevent the recollection of the past half-hour from stirring him strangely whenever it rose to his mind.

'We are close to the Californie now,' he said abruptly, 'so I will say good-bye.'

'Evidently he has no idea how soon we shall meet again,' she reflected, with a little amusement as she left him, and she looked forward to enjoying his surprise when he learnt that he might spend that afternoon, and probably several more, in her society, if he cared to do so. That he would so care, she felt assured; that she would be well-content was a point she was equally clear upon. And so she came into her mother's room in the highest good-humour.

'You don't mean to say you have been out in this hot sun all these hours?' said Mrs. Chevening; 'you will ruin your complexion, Margot, and your hands too!'

'You know I never freckle,' said Margot, 'and as for my hands—look!'

'Well,' said Mrs. Chevening, not being able to discover any fault in the pretty fair hands her daughter extended, palms downward, in self defence, 'but you ought not to be wandering about the town alone all the morning.'

'I was on the shore among the rocks, and I had what ought to have been a romantic adventure—someone came after me and told me it was dangerous to go on and I ought to turn back, so he walked all the way back with me.'

'I thought you had at least some sense of propriety!' said Mrs.

Chevening angrily; 'how can you *do* such things, Margot? What was he—who was he—how did you come to allow it?'

'I thought if the tide was really likely to cut me off, it would be as well to have somebody with me,' said Margot, 'so I made him turn back too.'

'You made him?—a stranger! Do you know what you are saying?'

'He wasn't exactly a stranger—at least, I knew him by sight. He's staying at the hotel. He is Mr. Chadwick's son.'

Mrs. Chevening's face, which had been a picture of progressive horror, suddenly cleared as Margot made this last announcement. 'You quite frightened me, darling,' she said. 'I was afraid it was somebody I knew nothing about. Still, I wish you would not have these adventures—you really must stay quietly with me in future. Tell me about this young Mr. Chadwick—was he pleasant, Margot?'

'He is a gentleman, at all events,' said Margot; but her mother divined at once that he had made a favourable impression.

'Well, you had better put on your things now,' she said. 'Did I tell you we don't lunch at *table d'hôte* to-day. Mr. Chadwick thought it would be pleasanter if we all lunched together a little later. That pretty surah frock of yours will do nicely, dear.'

'How fortunately things have turned out!' reflected Mrs. Chevening when alone; 'and she is looking her very best to-day!'

Margot took some little pains over her toilette, so that it was slightly after the appointed time that she came into the hall and was conducted by one of the waiters into a large room opening into the *salle à manger* to a table which had been laid for four by one of the windows where Mr. Chadwick and her mother were already seated.

'Well, young lady,' said her host, in his usual exuberant manner, 'I hope you've not brought a young lady's appetite after your adventure. Your mother's been telling me all about it. So my young rascal has saved you from a watery grave, eh? That's enough to make him a public benefactor.'

'It was very kind of him to warn me about turning back,' said Margot, 'but I don't know that it was quite a question of a watery grave.'

'That's the way we look at the thing now it's over, is it?' said Mr. Chadwick, with a resentment which showed itself through his boisterous geniality; 'I dare say by to-morrow you'll have quietly dropped him out of the affair altogether. Now,'—he was looking at the wine-list,—'the first thing is—what will you ladies like to drink? I dare say you won't say no to some champagne. Garçon, a bottle of that, and look here, just see if my son's lost his way, and tell him we're in here, will you? Oh, here he comes at last. Nice manners, young fellow; nice manners—keeping ladies waiting like this!'

Margot was sitting with her back to the big folding doors which

a waiter had just obsequiously thrown open, and she kept her eyes upon her plate. She was wondering how the son would carry off the situation; he had seemed easy and self-possessed enough, but was he able to keep his father in subjection without a painful amount of friction?—yes, she had confidence in him, that luncheon would be tolerable now he was come.

The waiter drew back the chair next to hers with the usual flourish, and not until it was taken did Margot raise her eyes to welcome her neighbour.

As she did so, all her anticipations crumbled into dust—the young man who sat at her side was an absolute stranger.

That was bad enough, but it was not the worst; even the hasty glance she took revealed a person whom the most charitable would hardly describe by the title ‘gentleman.’ Insignificant-looking, with a white face, hair parted in a plume, mouth open loosely from very evident embarrassment, a blunt common nose like his father’s, Allen Chadwick seemed to her in that first shock of utterly unexpected disappointment, the most odious person she had ever been brought in contact with.

The author, whose duty it is to see and describe from a less prejudiced point of view than Miss Chevening was capable of assuming just then, hastens to add that this face was redeemed to some extent by a pair of eyes which were deep and honest, with that pathetic look in them of a dog that only asks to be tolerated.

‘Mrs. Chevening,’ said his father, who evidently was perfectly satisfied with his son’s appearance, ‘this is my boy, Allen.’

Mrs. Chevening bowed graciously, whereupon Allen rose, knocking over his chair, and came awkwardly round to her, holding out his hand.

She was startled for a moment, but regained presence of mind to shake the proffered hand, and say, ‘Oh, how do you do? You must let me thank you for your gallantry to my heedless girl this morning.’

‘Eh?’ said the unfortunate Allen. ‘What girl?’

Margot bit her underlip. ‘Mother,’ she said in a low voice, ‘I—I made a mistake—it was someone else I met and took for Mr. Chadwick!’

‘Really, my dear,’ said Mrs. Chevening, ‘you make mistakes which are extremely annoying for others—pray sit down, Mr. Chadwick, and begin your lunch.’

‘So you’re not the lucky man after all, Allen?’ said his father; ‘well, you’ll have to make yourself all the more agreeable—see if you can give the young lady a glass of wine and drink to her better acquaintance. Stop, do you know her or don’t you? I haven’t got *that* straight yet.’

‘She—she has the advantage of me at present,’ said Allen Chadwick.

Margot compelled herself to touch the hand he extended, and

he spilt most of the champagne upon her gloves which lay by her plate. 'I'm sure I'm very sorry, miss,' he stammered.

Mrs. Chevening was smiling with an expression of suffering. 'Now we must leave Mr. Chadwick to enjoy his sole in peace,' she said; and he set to work in a tentative manner with two forks, which from nervousness he seemed as little at home with as with a pair of chopsticks.

Margot sat like a statue of disdain; she could hardly bear to think yet of all that the reality implied. What had become now of her bright hopes, the pleasant flutter with which she had put on her prettiest frock for that afternoon?—all for the benefit of this uncouth, underbred boy on her left hand! And who was the stranger she had rashly accepted as a Chadwick, and treated with the less reserve as one she was certain to know under any circumstances? How was she to meet him now, and what would he think of her? She was angry with herself, with her mother, with Mr. Chadwick, and most of all with the unconscious and innocent Allen.

It was a most uncomfortable luncheon party; a couple of German waiters, one patronising, as if he had paid for it all, the other morose, as if he expected to have to do so, only added to young Chadwick's very evident discomfort. Mrs. Chevening, who was in secret scarcely less mortified than her daughter, did her best to promote conversation, and the giver of the feast alone was easy and unembarrassed. He tried to draw his son out, but the young man confined himself to monosyllables until the champagne loosed his tongue a little.

'What's become of what's-his-name—Orme, by the way?' asked the father. 'I told 'em to keep a place for him at the regular *déjeuner*—know whether he went in or not?'

'I don't know,' said Allen; 'I'm not in his confidence. I haven't set eyes on him even to-day.'

'Well, there was lunch all there for him, so he might just as well have eaten it. Remind me to go into accounts with him sometime to-day, and see what I've got to pay for your tour, young chap. There's no occasion for him to be staying on here—unless you can't do without him.'

'Oh, I can do without him well enough,' Allen blurted out.

'Orme's a travelling companion I engaged for him,' explained his father, 'gentleman-like young chap—college fellow, at the Bar, and all that. But, somehow or other, he and my boy don't seem to have got on together—eh, Allen?'

'I never said so, governor, that I know of; he wasn't my style, that's all.'

'I made up my mind you'd fallen out when he came on alone last night; you'll be more careful how you get out to stretch your legs another time; it was a lucky thing you were able to come on after all.'

Now Margot knew how her mistake had arisen; her acquaintance of that morning must be this Mr. Orme; she could well under-

stand now how far from agreeable his travelling experiences must have been. And he was about to be dismissed like a common courier—he was not thought fit to sit down to luncheon with this polished pair! She would most probably never see him again, and her heart hardened against the person she considered responsible for this sudden termination of all she had been looking forward to, until, by the time the luncheon came to an end, she regarded her unfortunate neighbour with absolute antipathy.

‘If you ladies have any finishing touches to put to your toilettes,’ said their host gracefully; ‘you haven’t too much time. I told them to have the fiaker round at two sharp, so you’d better be at the entrance by that.’

Margot’s first proceeding was to discard the pretty open-work hat she had been wearing, and put on the plain boating-straw she adopted for everyday use; she could not escape going to Deauville now, or it would seem as if—well, she must go, but she could not resist indulging in this exhibition.

‘My dear child!’ cried her mother, as she discovered the alteration, ‘what possessed you to do such a thing as that? You were looking so nice before!’

‘This is quite good enough for the occasion,’ said Margot; ‘it really isn’t safe to speak to me just now, mother; such a *very* little would make me declare I won’t go at all.’

Mrs. Chevening looked at her face, and decided not to press the point. ‘I am sure you wouldn’t put me in such an unpleasant position as that at the very last moment,’ she said. ‘I could wish myself that young Mr. Chadwick had a little more manner, certainly, but you must have patience with him, dear.’

‘I know,’ said Margot. ‘But what I simply can’t understand is why you ever brought yourself to associate with such people at all. Was it worth crossing the Channel to encumber ourselves with two Chadwicks? They’re not even decently mannered, they’re not amusing, and we shall never get rid of them any more as long as we’re here! If you can see any pleasure in such a prospect as that, I certainly can’t pretend to follow you!’

‘We shall gain nothing by discussing it now,’ said Mrs. Chevening, a little uncomfortably; ‘the elder Mr. Chadwick is quite well-meaning, and I see nothing so objectionable about him, at all events. I don’t pretend the son is all he might be—but no one, Margot, is without his good qualities, if only one has patience to find them out.’

‘As if I wanted to find any of his!’ cried Margot; ‘but there—I promise to treat him as well as I can, only I do think it is a little hard on me, you know!’

Down below, the two Chadwicks were strolling up and down in front of the hotel.

‘Well,’ said the father, ‘you haven’t sat down to lunch often with a girl like that, I dare say.’

‘No, governor, I don’t know that I have.’

‘And is that all you say, as if such girls as that were as common

as coppers! Why, when I was your age I should have found more to say for myself than you did, I can tell you. You must make yourself more agreeable if you're going to get on with the ladies, young fellow!

'Well,' said Allen, 'I've not been used to ladies of her sort.'

'I know that—but what you've got to do is to *get* used. I give you the opportunity, it's for you to make the best of it. Lord bless me! a young chap of your age ought not to be afraid of speaking up to a girl; the prettier she is, the more you should lay yourself out to be agreeable.'

'I shall never do it like you do,' said Allen.

'You can try at all events. I've my reasons for wanting to see you friends, and girls look for liveliness and conversation; you must make yourself more pleasant, my boy; bless you, it's easy enough.'

Perhaps Allen himself was a little encouraged by his father's confidence, but there was ample reason for misgivings as to his chances of finding any great favour in the eyes of a young lady of Miss Chevening's fastidiousness. A young man of moderate abilities whom a cheap commercial education has just enabled to occupy a clerk's desk in a warehouseman's office, whose home-life has been colourless and mean, and his pleasures such as may be expected when mind and purse are equally ill-furnished, is at some social disadvantage, even when he has good looks and a glib tongue on his side, which Allen could not be said to possess.

From his mother, who had died in his infancy, he inherited a yielding and subservient disposition, which made him accept the monotony and drudgery of his early life without complaint; he lived with his mother's sister, a widow who kept a small shop in a back street, and who, kind as she was in her narrow way, had not been able to make the little parlour behind the shop a very attractive place wherein to pass his evenings. So he had gradually drifted into the amusements and resorts of his class, so far as he could afford them, though he had no actual predisposition to dissipation, and his excesses hitherto had been rare and venial enough, considering the nature of his surroundings. He was not without a feeling for the beautiful, though he had always looked on it from afar, as something in which, by the nature of things, he had and could have no part. Sometimes when he read the second-hand novels which, borrowed from a bookstall a few doors off, formed his only literature, he felt a vague discontent as he faintly realised a world of refinement, a society of beautiful women and accomplished men, but it was too great a stretch for his imagination ever to conceive himself as the hero of these romances; tawdry and fustian as most of them were, they smote him notwithstanding with the sense of his own insignificance.

And the cravings for something higher, some element of romance or passion, to ennoble his sordid existence were always inarticulate, half-unconscious, and would in the course of time have died a natural death, or found satisfaction in some makeshift attachment ending in

an imprudent early marriage, disenchantment, and a lifelong struggle for bare existence—had not Fate intervened in the most unexpected manner.

He knew that he had a father out in India in some capacity; his aunt from time to time received scanty remittances which defrayed his school and maintenance until he was old enough to earn his own living, when they ceased, and he had been informed that his father could do little or nothing for him in the future. Of his grandfather he had never heard, for his aunt cherished a deep resentment on account of the treatment her sister had met with, and so the great change in Allen's life had come upon him with the dazzling surprise of a fairy tale.

He had come back from the office tired and cold one snowy evening in January to supper, and in the little parlour behind the shop he found a stranger, so prosperous and generally splendid in his appearance that Allen hardly believed his ears when he was told that this was the father he had been accustomed to regard as a struggling exile.

The elder Chadwick was a little touched by the son's evident admiration; he felt some compunction for having done so little for him hitherto, his heart warmed with old memories of the dead wife, whose timid, grateful eyes looked at him once more from his son's pale face; from that moment father and son became more united than if they had always lived together instead of meeting then for the first time.

And Allen learnt the wonderful news that, thanks to the tardy repentance of the grandfather, his old life was ended for ever; he was to go and live in luxury and splendour with his father in future, down at the country place in Pineshire, where the old man had ended his lonely days.

At first he had felt strange and bewildered under these new conditions, but he soon became at ease with his father, whom he regarded with ardent gratitude and something very like reverence. In the son's eyes Joshua Chadwick, with his florid manner, his Indian experiences, and rough good-nature, seemed a superior being, by whose confidence and companionship he felt more than honoured. And the elder was satisfied with his son on the whole; the boy was not over bright, perhaps, he reflected, but he would improve, he wanted a little travel to give him a polish; and so, towards the end of the summer, Allen was sent abroad with a young man, whom his father, too much occupied by his affairs to accompany him immediately, had engaged to act as Mentor, until he was able to join him.

Nugent Orme had accepted the post, as the fee offered was a handsome one; he needed funds, and his chance of professional work was not good enough to keep him in chambers for the whole of the Long Vacation.

The engagement had been made by letter, and it was not until everything had been arranged that he had a personal interview with his charge, when he felt a shock of dismay at the task he had under-

taken. He had been prepared for some wild young fellow, fresh from a public school or newly rusticated, who would need a firm hand, but with whom he would have something in common, of whom he would have no cause to be constantly ashamed. With Allen Chadwick he found himself from the very first hopelessly out of touch; the young man was awkward, constrained, and, as it seemed, sulkily reserved with his leader. He appeared to have no tastes, no preferences, no interests; he acquiesced when Orme proposed that they should finish their tour by exploring some of the old Norman cities and towns; but the carven glories of Rouen, the stately abbeys of Caen, the cathedral of Beauvais rising in splendid incompleteness high above the clustered red roofs; St. Lo, with its twin grey spires and sleepy old square and streets, and Contances, enthroned on its poplar-covered hill, seemed equally powerless to draw the slightest sign of interest or appreciation from this young Chadwick. Such remarks as he made only confirmed Orme in the contempt he felt for this barren and stunted intelligence.

It cost Orme a positive struggle sometimes to keep his impatience and dislike from appearing too plainly under the constant irritant of such a companion, and involuntarily and without his knowledge something of his feeling showed itself in his manner occasionally. He welcomed the end of his task with a relief which he believed was fully shared by his fellow-traveller, but in this he was entirely mistaken.

Allen Chadwick was secretly dreading the moment of separation; he had been drawn towards Orme from the very first, and had long cherished the hope that before the tour was over the distance between them might be removed. To Allen this young man, only a few years his senior, with the fine clear-cut face and pleasantly incisive voice, the easy bearing and air of unconscious superiority, was a revelation. Orme was his hero, and could have made him happy at any time by a word or smile that spoke of real friendship and sympathy; but he waited for them in vain.

Orme never snubbed him, but, as has been said, he could not always disguise his repugnance, though it never occurred to him that this was perceived; nor would he in any case have given Allen credit for enough sensitiveness to be pained by such a thing. Nevertheless Allen did perceive it, and felt it acutely, although he hid his feelings characteristically under a mask of sullen reserve. He even tried to cherish a bitter resentment against Orme, and think of him as a stuck-up swell who gave himself airs because he had been to college. What was he, after all, but a paid dependent? And then Allen would be as nearly insolent as he dared, which is saying little enough, and would writhe under his senior's utter indifference.

Orme noticed with a contemptuous amusement these feeble attempts at self-assertion: what he never suspected was the heart-ache that underlay them; he looked upon his charge as a hopeless cub in whom there was nothing worth understanding; he did his

duty in keeping him out of mischief, and he was conscientiously civil to him—more than that he did not think could be expected from him.

Allen had been very depressed now that the tour was over, and the friendship he coveted further out of reach than ever; but, as he waited with his father before the hotel, Orme's approaching departure was far enough away from his mind. He could think of nothing just then but Miss Chevening, remember nothing but the fact that in a few minutes he was to see her again, that he was actually about to spend the whole afternoon with her. She had awakened all the latent romance in him, so long starved and denied an outlet; he would have given all he was worth to be of some slight service to her, to earn her gratitude in some unformulated manner; he was eager to give her a more favourable impression of himself, and no suspicion of his own grotesqueness in relation to her crossed his mind.

And yet, while he was secretly thrilling with a delicious excitement, he remained to outward observation the same dull, uncouth, and hopelessly uninteresting young man; his father did not guess the reason for his abstracted silence, and Allen was quite incapable of translating into words the impression Margot had made upon him, even if he had not shrunk instinctively from confiding it to anyone.

Presently she appeared with her mother, and he could not find any words to address to her. She seemed, he thought, displeased at something as she stood there; but it only made her look lovelier.

He did not speak even when the *fiacre* started, and they were all four driving, with the usual French accompaniment of whip-cracking, strange cries and jingling bells, down the street, and along the quay, with its row of yellowing limes, cafés, and masts. Margot sat opposite to him, but he could not see her eyes for the sunshade which she had opened, apparently not finding the white canvas awning above the vehicle a sufficient protection; she was very silent, but Allen was content to look at as much of her face as was visible, until his father, who had been carrying on all the conversation with Mrs. Chevening, gave him an admonitory touch with his elbow, intended to remind him of his recent counsels.

Allen turned crimson, but managed, after clearing his throat, to get out, 'We shall have it broiling hot on the course, by all appearances?'

The sunshade was slightly raised, revealing her eyes with a kind of haughty surprise in them. 'Were you speaking to me?' she asked. 'I didn't catch what you said—I beg your pardon.'

'Oh, it's granted, miss, I'm sure,' said poor Allen. It is difficult to understand, perhaps, why this form of accepting an apology—a far more logical and reasonable reply than the conventional 'not at all'—should stamp its utterer as one of the baser sort, but that it has that effect is undeniable. Miss Chevening's pretty eyebrows were raised a little higher, her expressive mouth took a downward curve.

'I was only saying, and I hope I didn't interrupt you, miss,' he went on, 'that it looked like turning out a broiling hot afternoon.'

'Oh,' said Margot; 'yes, it does not promise very well at present.' And the sunshade descended again, this time concealing the whole of her face.

'She's busy thinking over something,' he concluded.

She was thinking, truly enough, and the dainty screen hid a quiver of passionate indignation. 'How can mother expose me to this—how *can* she?' ran the burden of her thoughts.

The afternoon did not promise well indeed.

CHAPTER V.

VALENTINE AND ORSON.

She mutter'd 'I have lighted on a fool,
Raw, yet so stale!'—*Pelleas and Ettarre*.

OVER a bridge and the glittering tidal river, past the railway station and its lines of dingy rolling-stock, along a broad thoroughfare, a region chiefly of factories and workshops, the *fiacre* jingled in the stream of vehicles and foot-passengers, till it turned abruptly down a lane and in at a gate, where two nuns stood beseeching alms, and presently, after lurching and pitching over the turf, the carriage drew up along the railings near the winning-post. The variety of costume; the little *gardes municipales* in their green tunics and light-blue trousers; the blouses of the men, the white caps of the women, the tricorne and yellow belts of the gendarmes, the troopers in wide, cherry-coloured breeches, the curés in furry broad-brimmed hats, all gave an animation and shifting colour to the crowd, which was as naïvely pleased with itself and the spectacle provided as French crowds generally are on gala occasions. The fashionable and sporting contingent from Deauville was scantily represented, it being the last and least important day of the racing week. Mr. Chadwick's hired fly was one of the few vehicles on the ground. The steeplechase course would not have commanded much respect at Sandown, and the temper of a sentinel who stood guard over the highest hedge was severely tried by the behaviour of a small boy, who leaped it several times in a Remus-like spirit of derision.

'I think I will stay in the carriage,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'but there's really no reason why you should be a prisoner, Margot, dear, if Mr. Allen Chadwick will kindly take charge of you.'

'If you'd like to take a turn, I'll take care of you with pleasure, miss,' said Allen.

Margot had her own reasons for consenting, and as soon as Allen and she were at some distance from the carriage she began: 'Oh, Mr. Chadwick, there is one thing I really must ask of you.'

'You've only to name it,' said Allen, and his heart throbbed. Was he to do her a favour already?

'It's only a trifle, no doubt,' she said, 'but I really cannot let you speak to me as miss.'

'I didn't know you would like to be familiar all at once,' he said.

She shivered. 'You don't quite understand—we are not likely ever to be intimate, but—but we may meet occasionally here, and it is not necessary or usual to use any title or name at all. You may call me Miss Chevening if you like, but not Miss—if you do, I shall not answer. Do you think you can remember that?'

'Yes, Miss Chevening,' he said. 'I'm sure I'm only anxious to do the correct thing, but you see, Miss—Miss Chevening, it's like this, I——'

'Oh, please—not any explanations!' she said hastily. 'I quite understand—and now, tell me, does your father mean to stay here any time?'

'I promise you I shan't do anything to hurry him,' said Allen. 'This is a regular jolly place, little as I've seen of it, always something going on—it's like Yarmouth for that. There's nothing to do in all those old Cathedral places Orme would potter about in, and precious little to see.'

'Your friend Mr. Orme seems to have rather different tastes from yours?' observed Margot.

'He's no friend of mine,' said Allen awkwardly. 'I can do without his friendship well enough.'

'Is Mr. Orme the sort of person you can't bring yourself to associate with, then?' said Margot. 'Poor Mr. Orme!'

'It's him that holds off—not me,' said Allen. 'Not that he hurts me by it. I'm off his hands now, anyhow, and that's a blessing for both parties!'

'And has this Mr. Orme left Trouville, then?' asked Margot carelessly.

'He's got to settle up with the guv'nor first—he'll go as soon as he can—to-morrow most likely. He doesn't want more of me than he can help!' said Allen, with a forced laugh.

'Perhaps,' said Margot, 'you have not taken any pains to be pleasant to him.' ('I won't have Mr. Orme driven out of Trouville by this boor, if I can prevent it,' she was thinking. 'I wonder if I *could* prevent it.')'

'Much he cared whether I was pleasant or not!' said Allen; 'but there, Miss Chevening, don't let's talk about him. I've given up minding all that now—here are the horses coming out.'

Margot could say nothing more, and she detested him more cordially than ever at that moment; she was in a mood to hate everything just then, in her chagrin at the cruel trick that had been played upon her, and having nobody to blame but herself, she naturally felt disposed to quarrel with everybody else.

The horses came out, a string of weedy, long-tailed and long-legged screws, to most of whom the candid statement placed against two or three names on the official race-card, '*origine inconnue*' seemed equally applicable; but their appearance caused a flutter of

excitement in the crowd, and such admiring comments as 'Voilà le propriétaire lui-même qui monte !' 'C'est une belle bête tout de même.' 'Tenez, ça ne sera pas content de trotter, lui !'

It was not a very thrilling event perhaps, this *course au trot monté*, though with any other companion Margot might have found some amusement in the spectacle of some half-dozen French gentlemen of various degrees of corpulence going round and round the track at a hard trot which degenerated into a gallop at intervals; the favourite came in last, and an ill-conditioned dog added to his jockey's humiliation by yelping derisively after his horse's heels, 'Il n'est pas mouillé du tout; il n'a pas été poussé !' said the bystanders, in charitable excuse for his defeat; 'Fall it se servir de la cravache, vous savez.'

Margot was just about to suggest a return to the carriage when, as she glanced listlessly round, she saw her friend of the beach some yards away. Would he see her? Even if he did, she remembered, he could not well do more than return her bow—at least she would bow to him. But he did not once look round, he stood there alone, and she could not help thinking how handsome and manly he looked, what a contrast he made to this little monstrosity at her side. It was exasperating to know that he was going away in a few hours, while the other, her *bête noire*, would remain. She was powerless; even if they met in the little time that was left, what chance would there be of renewing that pleasant conversation by the sea-shore? She knew very well how it would be, they would not even meet at *table d'hôte*, for she would doubtless be condemned to form one of that quartette of the morning—he would go away without ever having learnt her name.

'You were asking me about Orme just now,' said Allen. 'If you want to know what he's like, that's him over there.'

'Where?' said Margot, with well-acted indifference; and when she did at last succeed in looking in the direction Allen mentioned, she said, 'So *that* is Mr. Orme! Don't you think he looks a little lonely all by himself—oughtn't you to go and speak to him?'

'He's not lonely,' said Allen; 'he wouldn't thank me for speaking to him, I can tell you!'

'I see,' said Margot, 'it wouldn't do for you to take any notice of a mere tutor, even though nobody here would know anything about it. I dare say you are quite right, but it seems a little curious.'

He flushed. 'It—it isn't *that*,' he said, 'it's Orme that's the one to look down. And I can't go and speak to him while I'm with you.'

Margot's heart was beating a little quicker than usual; she felt desperate. After all, Allen was not likely to see anything unusual in what she was anxious to lead up to.

'If I am the only impediment,' she said lightly, 'that can easily be settled. You can bring him up and introduce him to me if you like.'

'Do you want me to?' asked Allen, hesitating; he clearly did not welcome the suggestion with any enthusiasm.

'I said—if you liked,' repeated Margot, a little impatiently. 'I think,' she added with a slight smile, 'he will appreciate such an attention on your part.'

'He mayn't care about coming—he's a queer sort of chap,' said Allen; 'and—and what ought I to say to him?'

'Don't you really know how such a thing is usually managed, Mr. Chadwick?' exclaimed Margot, feeling angrier with him for emphasizing her humiliation in this way. 'Surely you can say that you want to introduce him to a friend of yours; it is not a very complicated operation, I should have imagined.'

'I've never done it before,' confessed Allen humbly, 'but I'll go and tell him that.'

'If only,' Miss Chevening meditated, 'if only he doesn't make some terrible mess of it—it will serve me right perhaps, though, if he does!'

Nugent Orme was abandoning himself to the surroundings, listening to the cries of the women who were inviting speculators to take a one-franc ticket in their 'poule,' of the small boys crying 'Demandez le Jockey du Jour!' with a shrill and yet not unmusical intonation, and the chorus from the bookmakers' quarter of 'Un et demi le champ!' 'Egalité le champ!' 'La place d'Emidoff!' and similar sporting technicalities, when he felt his arm touched, and turned to find Allen, with a very red face, standing at his side.

'Ullo!' said Allen clumsily, 'I—I didn't think I should see you here.'

'No reason why you shouldn't, is there?' replied Orme.

'No,' said Allen, 'only I didn't. And I say——'

'Well, what is it?' asked Orme, as he stopped in confusion.

'If you don't mind, I—I want to introduce you to a girl I'm with. It's that one over there.'

Orme's face, which had begun to wear a curious expression, changed as his eyes fell on Miss Chevening's graceful figure, which he recognised at once, though he could not conceive how Allen had managed to make her acquaintance. She was looking idly away just then, and seemed so little aware of either of them that he checked himself in his acceptance of the introduction.

'Did you ask her?' he said, feeling no confidence in his pupil's social proficiency; 'are you sure she wishes it?' He was too proud, much as he wished it himself, to run any risk of appearing to force himself upon her notice, especially with such a sponsor as poor Chadwick.

'It's all right,' said Allen, 'I told her who you were—she said I might do it if I liked.'

Allen brought him up to her, but here he broke down, and could only blurt out, 'This is Orme.'

Margot was quite at her ease as she laughed and said, 'After

all, Mr. Chadwick leaves me to introduce myself, Mr. Orme. I am Miss Chevening. Mr. Chadwick thought you might be feeling a little solitary in the crowd, but perhaps you are one of those people who never do feel solitary anywhere?’

‘On the contrary,’ he said smiling, ‘I am deeply grateful to him.’ And he put his hand on Allen’s shoulder for a moment with a friendliness which made the young man flush with pride and pleasure.

Margot had her wish after all; she had met this Mr. Orme once more, and the afternoon was not quite a failure. Still it was irksome to her to have Allen standing by, listening to every word that was said with what she chose to consider a mean inquisitiveness; in reality, he was only wondering, with a dash of envy, at the alteration in her tone which Orme’s presence seemed to have produced.

Orme himself was on his guard; he was cool and cautious by disposition, and he did not intend to allow his head to be turned by the fact that Miss Chevening thought fit to show him a marked graciousness. He could not come to any decided conclusion about her as yet; for all he could tell that curiously fascinating manner of hers—with its abruptness, its candour, its simplicity, varied by touches of irony—might be that of a consummate flirt. He was not sure whether in his heart he approved of her, but he felt the charm of her nevertheless. She interested him strangely, more than anyone he had ever met—this slender, imperious girl, with the hazel eyes and the gleam of bronze in her soft hair; but he must resist her, since he was going away next day, and her true character, simple or complex, would always remain a sealed book for him.

‘What is the next race?’ she said; ‘*au trot attelé*.’ I wish I knew which horse was the favourite—it makes it a little more exciting. Mr. Chadwick, I’m sure you know all about racing, which is the favourite?’

Allen had been to Hampton once, and had seen some races at the Alexandra Palace, besides betting with fellow-clerks to a greater extent than he could always afford, so this appeal naturally flattered him. ‘That’s more than I can tell just now,’ he said; ‘but we might go over to the bookmakers, and I could pick up something from them, I daresay. Would you like to be put on to anything for this race? I shall be proud of the job, I assure you.’

‘Thank you,’ said Margot, ‘I don’t bet, and I don’t care to go amongst those shouting men on the pedestals. I only wanted to know which is the favourite, if you could find out for me.’

Allen was transported by her tone and the smile which she gave him. ‘I’ll find out somehow,’ he said, ‘though I’m not much good at their lingo. I may,’ he added with a flourish, ‘do something on my own account.’

He went away, highly pleased at his commission, and when he

had disappeared in the crowd Margot turned to her companion with a smile.

‘I think I can understand now,’ she said, ‘why you did not find your tour particularly pleasant.’

He had, of course, made no allusion as yet to their previous meeting, and, in the altered state of his feeling towards Allen, her smile, taken in connection with his willingness to please her, seemed slightly cruel. ‘I had no right to imply that,’ he said; ‘I’m afraid it was a good deal my fault if we did not get on.’

‘No, it was not,’ she declared; ‘how could you do more than tolerate such a creature? I have only had to suffer him for two or three hours, but even that——. You must be feeling very glad you are going so soon. He told me you were leaving to-morrow.’

‘I am leaving to-morrow,’ he said a little sadly, ‘but I am not certain that I am glad.’

She would not have believed it, but he was not thinking so much of her as of his pupil just then. Something had been revealed to him within the last half-hour which gave him a pang of self-reproach; he had begun to doubt whether he had been altogether just towards his late companion, had not been too quick to despise him, too blinded by social prejudices to see such good points as he had. His conscience troubled him a little, and he was generous enough to be pained at the suspicion of having repelled his pupil’s timid and awkward advances all this time. It was too late now to make amends, but he reproached himself for having been so blinded by prejudice.

Margot, necessarily in ignorance of all this, was well satisfied that he should be sorry to leave Trouville; of course, although he could not say so in so many words, there could only be one reason why he should regret it.

‘I should be only too delighted if *we* were leaving to-morrow,’ she said, ‘but I suppose I shall be condemned to many more days of the society of Mr. Chadwick and his interesting son. The hotel was not wildly amusing before—but now!’ And she broke off with a little grimace of disgust which seemed charming on her brilliant face.

Orme laughed; the Chadwicks did seem a curious pair to be in companionship with her; he was not altogether proof against the flattery implied in this confession of dislike for another. ‘I dare say you will find means to avenge yourself,’ he said.

‘I am not very patient when I am bored,’ she confessed, ‘especially by persons of that class. Do you know, Mr. Orme, I must tell you—though you will not consider it a compliment—when we met this morning I thought *you* were Mr. Chadwick’s son. I did; I thought you were going to be here some time, instead of being on your way home.’

‘I wish that had been true,’ he said; ‘the latter part of it, at least.’

If you had not put that in,’ she observed, ‘I should not have

believed you—nobody *could* wish he were Mr. Allen Chadwick. It is a pity you will see nothing of Trouville,' she added; 'it's rather an amusing little place, and the surrounding country is so pretty.'

'I have been here before, but it is a pity,' he said simply. And just then the course was cleared for a race *au trot attelé*, with light gigs in the American style, which gave another turn to their conversation. But the longer he stood by her side, listening to her half-mocking, half-interested talk, the harder it seemed that in all probability their acquaintance would last but this one short day.

It was not until the race was over that either of them remembered Allen, and it was not Margot who suggested that they had better see what had become of him. They found him, excited but unintelligible, engaged in an altercation with the proprietor of a *nouvelle combinaison* on the *pari mutuel* system. 'I desire mon monnaie—toute la monnaie!' he was repeating; 'j'ai donné sept francs, et vous donnez deux francs et demi seulement. Je n'appelle ça un parry mutuel, je dis!' To which the bookmaker merely replied by a shrug of confidential pity to the audience. 'Vous voyez,' he appealed to them, 'ça—c'est un Anglais, ça n'est pas dans le mouvement!' Whereupon the crowd, particularly those who had been equally unfortunate, laughed in compassionate superiority.

Margot held aloof. 'If he chooses to make himself ridiculous,' she said, 'don't let us interfere. He will be hooted at presently.'

But Orme went up and drew him quietly away. 'You're no match for a French bookmaker, Chadwick,' he said; 'better give in.'

'But he's done me,' insisted Allen; 'I can prove it. I gave him——'

'And he's stuck to it, whatever it was,' said Orme; 'some bookmakers do. Come away.'

'I'll tell you how it was, miss,' protested Allen to Margot, 'I mean Miss Chevening. I went up to him——'

'It's quite useless explaining to me,' she said. 'I know nothing about betting, and I don't want to know anything. Hadn't we better go back to the carriage?'

Orme took this as a dismissal, rather to Margot's disappointment. 'Then I shall not see you again?' she said indifferently. 'I hope you will have a pleasant crossing.'

'Thanks,' he said. 'I am a good sailor. Good-bye.'

As soon as Margot was alone with Allen she suddenly changed her manner to him; she was as nearly gracious as she could bring herself to be.

'I thought you said Mr. Orme was glad to go?' she began.

'Why, isn't he?' There was an accent in his voice which encouraged Margot in something she had resolved to attempt. 'Has he been talking about it to you?'

'Do you want him to stay?' she said, looking away as she spoke.

'I—I should like it, if he liked it,' answered Allen, flushing.

'Don't you see,' she said, 'that he can hardly stay on now without an invitation? But I think that, if you were to ask him——'

'Would *you* like me to ask him?' cried Allen.

'I! What is it to do with me?' she said, exasperated at the thought that this boor had blundered on her true motive. 'Will you please understand that whether Mr. Orme goes or stays is perfectly unimportant so far as I am concerned. I thought you had taken a wrong idea into your head about him, and might be glad to have it corrected. I am sorry I said anything about it at all now.'

'I'm sure it was meant kindly on your part, miss,' said Allen. 'Of course I know you spoke out of friendliness to me, and I'm much obliged. I'll try whether Orme can be got to stay. I'll speak to him this very evening.'

'If you do,' said Margot, 'you will have the goodness not to mention my name, or I shall be exceedingly angry. You will recollect that?'

'I'd rather he thought it was all my idea,' he replied; 'and I do take it very kindly of you putting me up to it.'

'Don't say any more about that, please,' said Margot, feeling slightly ashamed of herself; but she was gratified, too, for she had now some cause for believing that she had not seen the last of Mr. Orme yet.

Meanwhile, much of Mr. Chadwick's conversation with Mrs. Chevening as they sat in the carriage by the winning-post had turned upon his son. 'I suppose now,' he had said, 'there's not much difference between my boy and your young lady, as far as years go—he's just of age?'

'Margot is only nineteen,' said Mrs. Chevening. She was much oppressed by the perversity of things in general just then; was it worth while, she wondered, persevering with her scheme any longer? Could she expect her daughter to marry such a completely unpresentable young man? The father was polished by comparison, and yet she would not have suffered him but for her hasty conclusion that his son would most probably be found to have escaped all trace of vulgarity, and be a young Englishman of the ordinary type, well-looking and well-educated. The reality had gone some way to cause her to lose heart; and yet—these Chadwicks were extremely well off, if Margot could bring herself to tolerate him, a load of anxiety would fall from her shoulders. Mrs. Chevening thought of her growing family and increasing expenses; what a help Margot might be to them all—if only she would!

'Nineteen,' said Chadwick, 'and admirers by the dozen already, I daresay? Does she happen to favour any one in particular, so far as you are aware, that is?'

Mrs. Chevening closed her eyes for a moment: 'I have no reason for supposing so,' she said faintly.

'Difficult to please, perhaps?' suggested Chadwick.

Mrs. Chevening, not finding any immediate answer to this, took refuge in one of those inarticulate murmurs which are so useful in such emergencies.

'Oh, I'm not blaming her, if she is,' he said. 'It's only natural she should know her own value. I've not seen anyone since I've been back in the old country, to come near her in looks.'

'I think she is pretty,' Mrs. Chevening admitted complacently. 'People seem to admire her, certainly. But beauty is such a mere accident.'

'It's the kind of accident a good many would like to meet with,' he said. 'Now, my boy—his face will never make his fortune. But for all that, he's a real good fellow, and so you would say if you knew him as well as I do!'

'That I can quite believe.'

'He's not been much used to ladies' society,' said Chadwick, 'but perhaps he's none the worse for that,' he added, as if to counteract any air of apology in his tone.

'At all events, it is a deficiency so easily overcome, isn't it?'

'Well, it's not everybody I'd say so much to, but I don't think it would do him any harm if he saw a little of a nice, well-brought-up girl—such as your young lady for instance. I shouldn't have any objection to his going about with her. And it makes it livelier for her, too, having a companion of the opposite sex.'

'I think my daughter is perfectly happy so long as she is with me,' said Mrs. Chevening, with a touch of dignity.

'Oh, no doubt, no doubt. Still, it isn't quite the same thing, is it? And, judging by the time they've been away together, they seem to have hit it off already.'

Mrs. Chevening kept her private doubts to herself, but presently when Allen and Margot returned, the restored animation and good-humour in her face afforded her mother an agreeable surprise; so long as she did not take one of her inveterate dislikes, things were not hopeless.

Soon afterwards the last race—a steeplechase over very mild obstacles—was run without any mishaps occurring to invest it with excitement, and then the drum beat to disperse the crowd, which streamed peacefully homewards, well satisfied with the afternoon's sport, and the fly carried Mr. Chadwick and his party through the long shadows and slanting red sunlight back to the Californic.

Margot's anticipations were justified: they dined apart that evening, after the *table d'hôte*, at which Nugent Orme had taken his place, not without a hope of seeing her again. She was not there, and he felt that it was on the whole better for his peace of mind. He was smoking a cigarette in the dusk in front of the hotel when Allen came out and sat down on the bench by his side.

For some time he was silent, but at length he said, 'I say, I wish we'd got on better together while we were away.'

'We got on pretty well together, didn't we?' said Orme, not knowing quite what to say.

'We were never what you may call thick,' said Allen; 'I know I've not had your education and all that. It's natural you should hold off from me.'

'If I ever did or said anything to make you think that, my dear fellow,' said Orme, 'I can only say I'm heartily sorry. You see, you rather kept me at a distance yourself.'

This view of the case was rather soothing to Allen. 'I wasn't going to force my friendship where it didn't seem wanted,' he said; 'that was why I kept to myself pretty much.'

'Well,' said Orme, with a little sigh, 'we shall know better another time, eh, Chadwick? I'm sorry we didn't learn to understand one another sooner. Where is your father, do you know? I must go into matters with him some time this evening.'

'Father's on the balcony with Mrs. Chevening and the others,' said Allen; 'and—what I wanted to speak about was this, Orme—you're not *obliged* to go to-morrow, are you?'

'I don't think your father expects me to stay on any longer,' said Orme.

'Oh, I spoke to him about that; he said I might ask you, and—and I wish you'd stay.'

Stay—and see more of Miss Chevening; was it prudent? and yet, there was nothing to call him back to his new chambers at present; would he not be ungracious in thrusting back Allen's offer of friendship? They could never, perhaps, be friends in the truest sense of the word, but he might do something to atone for his past superciliousness.

He had been gained by the other's evident desire to win his liking, a desire which he had never suspected till that day. To ask how far the prospect of meeting Miss Chevening contributed to influence him were to consider too curiously, but this change of feeling towards Allen was genuine enough.

'I'll stay with pleasure,' he said warmly; 'it's kind of you to wish it.'

Allen's heart swelled with a great joy; he had scarcely hoped to be met like this, and felt bigger in his own estimation. 'I'm glad you'll stay,' he said: 'I'm glad you don't mind being friends.'

And the two shook hands. It was a singular result to follow the caprice of a self-willed girl, this establishment of a better understanding between two such natures as those of Allen and Orme; but though it brought about the conclusion she wished, she had not designed it, nor would she have been interested by so unimportant a matter.

CHAPTER VI.

SO YOUNG AND SO UN-TENDER!

What right *can* you have, God's other works to scorn, despise . . . revile them

In the gross as mere men broadly—not as *noble* men, forsooth,—

But as Pariahs of the outer world, forbidden to assail them

In the hope of living—dying,—near that sweetness of your mouth ?

Lady Geraldine's Courtship.

NUGENT ORME stayed on at Trouville as Mr. Chadwick's guest, but somehow he did not find as many opportunities as he had hoped for of improving his acquaintance with Miss Chevening. Her mother had shown him especial civility, and had introduced him to many of her friends, the Whipples in particular ; his chair was placed next Miss Magnolia's at *table d'hôte*, an arrangement which did not displease that young lady. But he never found his seat near Margot's, and such conversations as he had with her were short and semi-public.

As for Margot, without very well knowing how it was or how to avoid it, she found herself constantly paired off with the obnoxious Allen, who would not see how intensely she disliked his companionship ; his shyness was wearing off a little—which made her detest him all the more ; she raged in secret, and at last expostulated openly with her mother.

'It is improving him so wonderfully, darling,' was all Mrs. Chevening could find to say.

'It is not improving *me*—it is driving me nearly insane. I simply *cannot* stand him, mother.'

'You wouldn't say so if you knew how it pleases his father—he feels how incomplete his son's training has been, and is so glad for him to be with you.'

'Why should I complete other people's sons, dear ? and why do you care whether Mr. Chadwick is pleased or not ?'

'It should be enough for you that I do wish it,' answered Mrs. Chevening with a rather weak assertion of her authority. 'We are not so surrounded by friends, my dear, that we can afford to offend people who are only too willing to show us every kindness. If you had a little more heart, Margot, you would be touched by that poor boy's anxiety to please you, you would indeed !'

'I suppose I haven't any heart, dear, for it only irritates me. And the worst of it is, I can't make him see it ; some day I shall speak so plainly that even he will have no excuse for not understanding.'

Mrs. Chevening flushed with unmistakable anger. 'Listen to me, you heedless girl,' she cried. 'I forbid you—— I forbid you to

say anything insulting to that young man ! Think what you please of him, since you are determined to dislike him, but behave decently to him in public you must and shall. It is not a great deal to ask of you, after all the expense I have incurred in coming here—solely on your account. I thought it would be a pleasant change for you—and this is my reward !’

Margot dreaded a burst of tears at this point, and hastened to make a timely capitulation. ‘There, mother dear,’ she said, ‘don’t scold me. I’m not really going to be naughty. Why, if you wished it, I’d walk about Trouville with a bear ; indeed, a nice brown sleepy bear wouldn’t be nearly so—never mind. I’ll make the best of the—the other animal, the *bête noire*. But I do think that I ought to be allowed to abuse him when he’s not to hear me.’

She looked so charming as she stood there, with a half-humorous protest beneath her suppliant expression, that her mother’s displeasure was appeased.

‘Ah, Margot,’ she said with a sigh, ‘if you only knew your own power !’

‘That’s exactly what they say of wild beasts in a cage, dear. Would you like to put *me* in a cage ?’

‘You have no right to say such things,’ cried Mrs. Chevening, when you know I am only anxious for your good—for the good of you all. It is unkind and ungrateful of you to talk to me about cages.’

Margot stared. ‘Why, I meant nothing—what *could* I mean ? Evidently this isn’t one of my lucky mornings. Come down and sit on the sands somewhere, and you shall see how good I can be.’

On that occasion, as it happened, Miss Chevening was spared from proving the genuineness of her good intentions. Under one of the giant umbrellas they found the Spokers. ‘I’ve been trying to induce Alfred to bathe,’ Mrs. Spoker announced, ‘but he’s afraid of my finding out how badly he swims. He says he has his tub every morning, but *I* believe he stands outside and splashes.’

‘Sea-bathing doesn’t agree with me,’ said Mr. Spoker.

‘I think perhaps he is right about that,’ remarked his wife impartially, ‘because he bathed once when we were at Torquay on our honeymoon, and he was perfectly green all day. I shall always think of him—pale green with a bright crimson nose,’ she went on cheerfully ; ‘yes, you *were* like that, dear. I very nearly packed up and went home at once.’

‘Why didn’t you tell me ? I would have done all the packing for you,’ said her husband.

‘I thought it was my duty to bear you, whatever colours you turned,’ she said ; ‘and I must say he has never looked quite so like a dying dolphin since. But you are dreadfully odd and peculiar, Alfred, in lots of ways.’

She was proceeding to describe her astonishment on first seeing Alfred scrubbing the top of his head with a nail-brush, when one of

the opéra-bouffeish *cabanes* came creaking and jolting over the sand and stopped a few paces off.

'There's young Mr. Chadwick,' said Mrs. Chevening. 'Mrs. Spoker, do you know that it's market day? Wouldn't it be pleasant for you and Mr. Spoker, and Margot and——'

'Oh, and there's that nice Mr. Orme, too,' cried Mrs. Spoker; 'delightful! No, Alfred, I shan't let you come, five's an awkward number; you must stay and amuse Mrs. Chevening, *she* hasn't heard all your stories. Mr. Orme will take care of me.'

Probably Mrs. Spoker had some idea of the truth, and was mischievous enough to thwart any schemes Mrs. Chevening might be entertaining; or else she gathered from Miss Chevening's expression that she would be grateful for a little relief from young Mr. Chadwick's society, and had the goodnature to oblige her. At all events the four had not proceeded far before Mrs. Spoker had effected a transfer of partners, and Orme found himself assigned to Margot.

It pleased her to express some surprise at his being still at Trouville. 'I thought you left yesterday or the day before,' she said. 'I haven't seen you anywhere.'

'I'm afraid that was because it did not occur to you to look. I was at *table d'hôte*.'

'Oh, so you were, I remember now—you were sitting by the Whipples. I hope you found them entertaining?'

'Very.'

'Miss Whipple is amusing—when you like that kind of thing. Well, I wish I had been in as pleasant company as you appear to have been. I haven't been amused at all. Mr. Orme, tell me, weren't you induced to stay on here by the prospect of having some more of Mr. Allen Chadwick's society?'

'I stayed on his invitation,' he replied.

'I wish you could manage to enjoy a little more of it, because I seem to have monopolised it at present, and I don't want to be selfish.'

'If I have had less of it than I might have expected that is really not my fault.'

'You mean that it is mine? What I must have been depriving you of! Have you been very inconsolable?'

'I think I ought to tell you,' he said, 'I'm afraid I gave you the impression that I disliked him rather than otherwise. It was true then; but lately I have come to see that I was unjust. I see much now that I would not see before.'

'Ah,' she replied; 'I suppose he is seen to better advantage at a distance—like a mountain; but you see I have had no opportunities of discovering that for myself. I have been so very unfortunately placed. But I am rather curious to know what these newly-discovered beauties in his character really are. Has he suddenly developed a sense of humour, or a glimmering notion of how he ought to behave? Was his twang assumed to try us? Or is he

that boringest of all bores—the rough diamond? Do please enlighten me.'

'I don't think it would be of much use if I tried,' he said. 'Suppose we change the subject?'

'Suppose we do without a subject,' she retorted, and walked on in majestic silence with her chin very much elevated. Miss Chevening did not take at all kindly to a setting-down. He had been a little repelled again by this exhibition of disdain, he thought her needlessly hard, and yet there was something captivatingly childish in this petulance of hers which made it difficult to take her seriously.

'Is talking strictly prohibited?' he said at last, and she broke into a charming, unwilling smile.

'Was I cross?' she said. 'Yes, I know I was. But you were so very superior, weren't you? Never mind, here we are at the market, let us try to finish our walk without quarrelling.'

Her eyes were kind and frank and friendly again, and for the rest of the morning no one could have been more sweetly engaging, more ready to give pleasure and be pleased, than this most contradictory and variable young lady. Orme wandered by her side, through the maze of white-capped old women, with their baskets and stalls heaped with wares of all kinds—butter in leaves, live rabbits in boxes, dogfish in baskets, and cool, fresh-smelling country-produce. All the time he had a sense of the delight and privilege of being with her, coupled with a kind of impatience at himself that his enjoyment was not keener and more conscious still. It seemed to him that it was somehow not so delightful now as he felt it would be to look back upon later.

Near the quay a travelling dentist had stationed a gilded vehicle like a diligence, from the coupé of which, gorgeously arrayed in a crimson dressing-gown, he was commending the virtues of a tooth-ache tincture, while a young woman on the roof punctuated his more impressive periods with a pair of cymbals. As they came up he was sprinkling his audience with drops of the tincture, by way of an appeal to their senses. 'If it smelt unpleasantly,' he was good enough to explain, 'I should not permit myself to offer it to you.' But Miss Chevening bestowed all her notice upon a small wooden box which was suspended from the splashboard, and which had a pane of glass in front. Through this pane peered a melancholy and cynical little monkey, which had excited her sympathies. The crowd of grinning fisher-lads and wrinkled old peasants made way for her as she moved up to the cage. 'Oh, see, Mr. Orme,' she cried appealingly, 'the poor little thing! Is he a patient, do you think? Do they try the tincture and things on you, dear? No, your teeth are too good.' And, bending down, she began to talk the most charming and caressing nonsense to the captive, while Orme wondered idly whether the monkey was at all consoled by the sight of that exquisite face at his prison wicket. Probably the creature's ideal was something very different; he merely

blinked his tired eyes and scratched his ear with a bored suspicion.

The dentist was inviting any sufferer from toothache to step up and obtain relief, whereupon a sheepish and palpable hireling mounded, and was treated with the tincture to the sound of cymbals. 'Vous êtes consolé, n'est-ce pas?' the professor inquired majestically, after a dramatic pause for the cure to take effect. 'Mais oui,' said the patient, with a perfunctoriness that suggested consolation in advance. Then, as the dentist showed an alarming disposition to become anatomical (with diagrams), and to produce unpleasant things in bottles out of the boot, Nugent thought it as well to go on, and they strolled along the quay by the fish-stalls, which were laden with immense and hideous flat fish, heaps of little grey shrimps (which a marketing *bonne* would occasionally stir up with the ferule of a depreciatory umbrella), and Prussian-blue lobsters, blindly groping for revenge. And Miss Chevening had remarked the prevalent expression of the fish—a ludicrous goggle-eyed astonishment that they should have been caught at last, taken in by a trick as old as the sea itself.

'I remember feeling quite guilty about catching a fish once,' said Orme. 'I was out deep-sea fishing, and we caught an immense cod. He lay there, gasping and spluttering, in the bows, exactly like a highly respectable and indignant old gentleman in a white waistcoat; he only wanted a gold chain. I really felt inclined to apologise for taking the liberty of hooking him.'

'But you didn't put him back?'

'Well—no; but I avoided his eye. He breathed his last with a calm dignity that completed my remorse.'

'The remorse of the Walrus and the Carpenter,' she said. 'Look, this fish has a striking face—they call it a "St. Pierre" here—one side of his profile is pious and resigned, the other is sneering and malignant. I wonder which he kept for his family.'

All this is trivial enough, and would be scarcely worth recording were it not that it is just such light-hearted foolish talk as this that advances an acquaintanceship many months in a single hour. Orme saw a new Miss Chevening, tender-hearted, full of the sweetest gaiety, simple and natural; a very different person from the scornful, sarcastic young lady of half an hour before. Presently in some way she came to tell him about her family, and the old riverside home at Chiswick.

'Such a queer, shabby, out-of-the-way old house,' she said, 'with only a narrow little path and some old poplars in front, no road, and then the river. But the dearest old place for all that—especially in the summer, when you can sit out on the balcony and see the boats go shooting by, and the people streaming across the bridge to Kew Gardens. Even in the winter, though, when it's all foggy and misty, I like it. I am always glad to get back to it. I hated it when we first went to live there—we all did—but now I wouldn't change it for any place in the world.'

This and more of the same nature he learnt from her during that walk; and all the time he had her quite to himself, for Mrs. Spoker kept Allen at a discreet distance until the return, when she joined them, in raptures with the dentist, to whom she declared she intended to present her husband for scientific purposes.

Orme, as has been said, came away with a deeper and more pleasing impression of Miss Chevening, but he was by no means in love with her even yet; he told himself that she was an interesting study, a comrade who could be delightful when it pleased her. She was certainly lovely, but the type of woman he admired was smaller, fairer, less mutinous, if not meeker, than Margot, with her fine physique, her masses of dusky hair with the gleam of bronze in it, and her vivid, spirited face. There was not the least danger; and besides, had she not, even in the short time he had known her, shown qualities which in his heart he did not admire? He was not in love, that was certain; but he thought of her pretty constantly notwithstanding.

He had more frequent opportunities of observing her now, for since that walk with her, it had come to be looked upon as a natural thing that he as well as Allen should be in attendance upon Miss Chevening. Her mother, though of course present on these occasions, raised no objection, being either too indolent to engage in any further encounter with her daughter, or doubtful whether she could interfere without offending Chadwick, which she was very anxious to avoid.

But this greater freedom of intercourse brought Orme, on the whole, more of torment than delight, though each day he felt the physical attraction of her more powerfully, and she made no secret of a growing pleasure in his society.

Allen usually made the third person in the party, and it was her treatment of him which almost counteracted her charm in Orme's eyes. Generally she scarcely deigned to notice him at all, but if she did it was invariably in a subdued tone of profoundest contempt; when she had occasion to speak of him in his absence it was with the deepest, the most unsparing disdain.

Some men might have found a delicious flattery in such a contrast. Orme had a somewhat ascetic conscience in these matters, his keen admiration of this girl's beauty made him a sterner critic of her faults, which he absolutely resented. With all her loveliness, he denied her right to adopt that attitude of supreme scornfulness to one so helpless and inoffensive as the unfortunate Allen; every fresh instance of it gave Orme a sharper pain, and the fact that Allen was quite unconscious of all her veiled mockery only made her conduct worse in his friend's eyes. Why, he wondered, should she, who looked all that was sweet and lovable, show this ugly side to her nature? As it would be worse than useless to protest, he would at least do nothing that would imply acquiescence, he would prevent this young Chadwick from being made publicly ridiculous.

And, perhaps with a view to his own protection from a greater danger, he contrived expeditions for Allen and himself to various places along the coast and inland which kept them away from the rest of the party for the greater part of each day.

At last this precaution defeated itself. He and Allen had taken the train to Pont l'Évêque, and were walking back to Trouville by way of Bonneville, the fine old Norman stronghold where Duke William extended a dubious hospitality to Saxon Harold, and Matilda beguiled her solitude by needlework, and Berengaria mourned for Cœur de Lion. The massive keep and the old walls with crumbling towers at the angles are all that remain of the castle now, though a whitewashed, green-shuttered building has grown in amongst the ruins like a parasite. Outside the entrance they saw a large white-awned break and pair, and in the courtyard—which is now neatly laid out with gravel walks and turf, blazing flower-beds and fruit-trees—a party of tourists had just preceded them.

'Oh yes,' Orme heard a familiar voice remarking, 'I know very well it's all perfectly sweet and too majestic for anything, but I don't seem as if I *could* have my imagination excited by any more old relics. I've been round peopling so many antiquated piles with knights and pages and châtelaines and troubadours that I don't feel to have any left for a number-two ruin like this. I can't recreate the dead past worth a red cent to-day. Oh, Mr. Orme, now this is what I call a delightful meeting! I hope you feel it delightful as well? Yes, we're all here, the others are going round. M. de Pommesucant, we'd better go round too, if you've no objection.'

'It was Mr. Chadwick's idea—our coming here in a party,' explained Miss Whipple to Orme as they walked on; 'he managed it all—he's perfectly splendid at managing. I do admire him for one thing, anyway,' she added in a tone of impartial laudation, 'he's a live man all the time, there are no flies on him.'

Orme could see the rest of the party on ahead—Chadwick, the Spokers, the Whipples, and Mrs. Chevening, and, with a thrill he could not prevent, he saw a slim tall figure which could only belong to Miss Chevening. 'I say,' Mr. Spoker was observing, as they all stood round a kind of deep cellar, 'this is interesting—*isn't* it interesting, now? The guide says this is the identical *oubliette* in which De Chaumont was imprisoned by Richard I.; how it carries you back to the old times, eh? See, there's a lamp burning down there.'

'Before you're quite carried back, dear,' said his affectionate wife, 'perhaps you'll tell us who De Chaumont was, and what he did. Ah, I *knew* he didn't know!' she cried, 'he was so very enthusiastic.'

'I know quite enough to make it interesting to me, my love, whatever it may be to you,' he retorted. 'Here's a curious thing, now, we are coming to the very chapel in which Harold took the solemn oath to help William to acquire the throne of England.'

'Why,' remarked Miss Whipple, 'there isn't room to take so much as an affidavit in there!—no wonder he broke it. Let's come away, this is disenchanting.'

'Mees Chevenain,' the young Frenchman, an enthusiastic Anglo-maniac, was saying to Margot, 'will you make with me the ascension of the tower? and upon the top we will 'ave a beautiful blow on the eye.'

Margot was in rather a reckless mood just then; for some time she had noticed Orme's defection, and resented it deeply. She had found him agreeable and interesting, she had respected him and been anxious to have his good opinion. Now, it seemed, he preferred the company of that ill-bred idiot to hers. Of course she affected to treat the whole matter with indifference, but her heart was very bitter against both Allen and his friend, and she was childishly ready to seek some means of retaliation.

She had chosen not to see the newcomers, and, by way of avoiding them, went up the worn stone steps with M. de Pommesuçant, and stood on the little platform looking down on the moat, whose velvet-ridged sides were flecked with shade from the gnarled old apple-trees that grew along the bank. Beyond, across the tree-tops, lay the shimmering plain, with the roofs of Touques glittering in the afternoon sun, and, further still, the deep lapis lazuli blue of the sea. Inland stretched a rich country landscape, a patchwork of deep chocolate, tender green, and the brilliant yellow of the colza, intersected by long double lines of poplars, and backed by distant ultramarine hills. The *battoirs* of the washerwomen, as they knelt over a soapy little roofed tank below, made a cheerful hammering.

'You find it magnificent?' her companion asked.

'The view?' she said absently—she had hardly noticed it—'oh yes.'

'And I,' he agreed. 'To some, nature is *triste* and wants of gaiety. For me, no. I am like you others—you English. I love the repose, the picturesque. I come to Trouville, not to live as in Paris, but for change, for simplicity. I am very fond of all your English ways of living: your fox-hunt, your dogcart, your novel—ah, how I adore your "Vicaire of Wackfiel" and your "Clarisse Arlow"!—your 'ome and your games of the family. There is a game I have often heard but seen nevere, it is called, I think, "Kiss at a Ring;" could you inform me how to play him?'

'I am afraid not,' said Margot; 'but there is someone below who I darsay could tell you all about it; we will go down and I will ask him.'

In the courtyard she saw Allen and Orme, with all of the party except her mother and Mr. Chadwick, who were watching the custodian as he dropped pieces of lighted newspaper down the castle well.

'Mr. Chadwick,' said Margot sweetly to Allen, in her clear soft tones, 'M. de Pommesuçant is very anxious to know how "Kiss in the Ring" is played. I suppose you have played it often enough on

Bank Holidays, and are quite an authority; would you mind explaining it to him?'

'It's simple enough,' said the unsuspecting Allen. 'We might have a game here, if you didn't mind.'

'Thanks,' she said, 'we should mind very much. You see, M. de Pommesuçant, English ladies are not in the habit of playing "Kiss in the Ring."'

'Then it is only for the English gentlemen?' said the mystified Frenchman.

Miss Chevening laughed. 'I must leave Mr. Chadwick to answer that, *he* plays it at all events. Where do you play it, Mr. Chadwick?—at tea-gardens and places of that sort? Please instruct M. de Pommesuçant.'

'A thousand thanks,' said the latter gentleman gallantly, 'but I do not wish to learn a game I cannot play with the English ladies.'

'Perhaps you are right,' said Margot; 'it is not at all an aristocratic amusement, in spite of Mr. Chadwick's fondness for it.'

She had the gratification of knowing that Nugent Orme was standing close by, and she could see from his expression that he was intensely angry. She did not care, anything was better than that he should seem so provokingly unconscious of her existence.

The rest of the party had gone on in search of further objects of interest or points of view, and she was preparing to follow when she was stopped by Orme.

'Don't go yet, Miss Chevening,' he said. 'I want to speak to you.'

There was an air of authority in his tone that mastered her. 'You must find me a seat, then,' she said.

There were some under the fruit-trees, and she sat down. 'Do you prefer standing?' she said, as he stood moodily by.

'Yes, I do,' he said shortly. 'Miss Chevening,' he broke out a moment after, 'why, in Heaven's name, can't you leave that poor young Chadwick in peace?'

She was provokingly innocent and surprised. 'What did I do? I merely assumed he had played a vulgar game, and as it turned out I was quite right.'

'You did it to humiliate him and make him openly ridiculous,' he said.

'He noticed nothing.'

'Such an excuse as that is worse than none. I thought, if I kept him out of your way as much as possible, you would have some consideration for him when you did meet.'

She sat there restlessly spreading and shutting her hand. 'I can't help it,' she said rebelliously; 'I do not see why I should have to meet such a person at all, and when I do—— But you would never understand how I feel about it. I can't be civil to him; the mere sight of him——'

'I don't understand,' he replied. 'I hope I never shall. Whatever you are and whatever he may be you have no right to treat

him with a contempt like this. It is insolent, wicked ; you ought not to encourage it, for your own sake, Miss Chevening. If you despise him so intensely, that should be a reason for letting him alone.'

She coloured, she knew, if he did not, what her real motives had been in making that gratuitous attack on his protégé ; apparently she had succeeded only too well.

'You are a very warm partisan,' she said maliciously. 'Don't they say that the latest converts are always keenest to make proselytes ? Wasn't your own conversion rather recent, Mr. Orme ?'

'At least,' he retorted angrily, 'I can't charge myself with having been carried away by prejudice.'

'As I am ? I don't admit that it is prejudice ; I call it instinct, Mr. Orme, the instinct given to us for our protection against noxious creatures of all kinds. But whatever it is,' she added wilfully, 'I have it and I must obey it, whether it displeases you or not. So I'm afraid your lecture has not done very much good to anybody.'

'Evidently,' he answered.

He felt irritated and depressed, he had only made matters worse by speaking, and even now, angry as he was with her, he was gallingly conscious that that air of impertinent mockery made her more bewitching than ever.

'Have you quite finished your remarks ?' she inquired, 'because, if so, I think I will go and see what the others are doing over there. Don't let me disturb you.'

He watched her go lightly across the turf without attempting to follow her ; she was singing gaily to herself as she went. She had no heart, he thought ; she was as irresponsible in her careless cruelty as a child.

In justice to Margot, however, it should be mentioned that she had had some additional reasons of late for emphasizing her dislike of Allen. She more than suspected that her mother was secretly encouraging the idea of an engagement between them ; she had more than once been certain that she had heard her name and his coupled together in conversation by Chadwick, with whom her mother seemed now so completely in accord. Nothing should make her yield to anything so horrible and preposterous ; of that she was serenely confident ; but in the meantime she would leave as little room for misunderstanding as possible. She was not very angry with Nugent. The difference between them had formed rather a pleasing excitement ; he had looked particularly well when roused ; she looked forward to several repetitions of the scene. It was highly absurd and presumptuous of him to take sides against her and find fault with her, but it was better than if she had been unimportant in his eyes. If she chose, she thought, she could soon make him change his opinion ; it was impossible that he could really place Allen before her.

Orme was considering how soon he could bring his stay to a close without discourtesy to Chadwick, when Mrs. Chevening re-

lieved him from all perplexity on that point. She came to him under the trees, smiling at him as she advanced with her most laboured insincerity.

'So sorry, dear Mr. Orme,' she began, 'to hear we are to lose you so soon! Mr. Chadwick tells me you are leaving to-morrow, I didn't know you were only staying here a week.'

In any case, unless his desire to stay had overcome all self-respect he could not have ignored so very plain a *congé*, seeing that she had evidently been deputed to this delicate mission. As it was, he was glad of his release.

'Yes, I must leave here to-morrow,' he said. 'I have stayed too long already.'

'Not too long for us, not nearly long enough,' she replied graciously; 'but of course there is your profession—the Bar, is it not? and to succeed in that you must work so very hard. I can quite understand that you don't feel justified in taking a longer holiday—quite—quite, Mr. Orme.'

'Where are Mr. Allen Chadwick and Mr. Orme?' asked Miss Whipple a little later.

'They've walked on,' said Mrs. Chevening. 'Mr. Orme wouldn't take a seat in the break; so foolish of him, when he will want to get back early; he has all his packing to do.'

'Why, is Mr. Orme going away?'

'Oh, I thought you knew; he was just telling me all about it, how he couldn't stay a day over to-morrow—a week was all he intended to stay; it seems such a very arduous profession, the Bar.'

There were comments of various kinds, though none unfavourable upon Orme, and some expressions of sorrow at his departure, but Miss Chevening did not join in them. It is possible that she had not heard that he was leaving, for she was much interested in ascertaining the precise depth of the castle-well at that time.

CHAPTER VII.

A REACTION.

From which I escaped heart-free, with the least little touch of spleen.

—*Maud*.

THAT evening Orme, having finished his packing, such as it was, had come down and gone out upon the terrace overlooking the sands. It was deserted just then; empty coffee-cups and liqueur glasses stood on the little round tables, the visitors had adjourned to the Casino or their private rooms—he had the place to himself. He leaned upon the balcony rail and looked out to sea, on which darkness was rapidly closing, the long bars of orange and citron which broke the slate-coloured cloud-banks in the west were narrow-

ing and fading, and over the dim sands below, the light from the hotel lamps flickered fantastically as the breeze blew the tricoloured banners with which they were festooned across their globes, and, farther out, the waves broke in gleaming phosphorescent rolls. Far away to the right, two bright revolving lights and a chain of fiery points indicated Havre, where he would be next day; on the left were the crimson and green lights of the piers and the garish electric halo above the Casino.

He was thinking, a little sorely, about Miss Chevening. He had not spoken to her since their conversation in the courtyard at Bonneville. He had seen her at the *table d'hôte*—at a distance as usual—and that would in all probability prove to have been his last sight of her. Perhaps, as he was bringing himself to see, it was best so. There had been peril in his friendship: he had come dangerously near losing his heart to her. He had admired her unwillingly, against his better judgment, unable altogether to resist the charm of her *insouciance*, her graceful disdain, her pretty impertinences, even when most distrustful of the nature they seemed to reveal.

But this last experience had cured him, disenchanted him, he thought. This girl was more than careless—she was cruel, merciless to everyone that did not fall in with her fastidious taste; remonstrances, appeals were thrown away upon her. Heaven help the man who let himself love such a woman as that! Well, he had had his warning; he should go away next morning without a pang or a regret—except that disenchantment is perhaps fraught with the keenest regret of all. While he was indulging in these meditations, he heard the swing-doors move behind him and the sweep of drapery, and then his name called by Miss Chevening herself. He turned, to find her standing close by, her eyes shining and her face looking pale in the subdued light.

'You have something to say to me?' he asked, wondering greatly.

'I wanted to ask you first, if it is true that you are going away to-morrow?'

'Quite true. It was understood that I could only be here a week.'

'I did not know. If I had, I should not have spoken as I did this afternoon to you.'

'I really don't remember,' he said, 'that I had any reason to complain personally of what you said.'

'Ah!' she said, 'don't put me off by being cold and civil, please, Mr. Orme; I couldn't bear to think that our last talk should be like that. I don't want you to go away thinking very badly of me—and—and I am afraid you will!'

She spoke with such a sweet humility, such childish eagerness to put herself right with him, that no man could have hardened his heart against her, and no one but a coxcomb have misinterpreted her appeal.

'It is too good of you to care what I think,' Orme said.

'Of course I care! Haven't we been friends? Considering how short a time we have known one another, we were very good friends, I think—till lately. And though I don't suppose we are very likely to meet again, I should like to part friends. I don't want to have it all spoilt at the last.'

She was more dangerous just then than he had ever found her before. He had to keep a firm command over himself to restrain some speech which would be a hideous mistake.

'I know,' she went on, 'it was I who spoilt it, but—but I think you are a little too severe. You don't consider enough what it is to me to have to know a creature like that, it's so different for a man—it is really! And it acts on my nerves, it makes me—well, not myself. I am not bad except to people I thoroughly dislike. This afternoon, I own, I had no excuse—it was mean of me, but seeing him there suddenly—it annoyed me; I wanted to make him feel a little, but he felt nothing—it was I who felt ashamed! And that made me speak to you as I did. You know how I hate owning myself in the wrong, but I will this once—just a little bit.'

Orme could not help being amused as well as touched. Miss Chevening's penitence was so evidently of a limited order.

'That is something, isn't it?' he said, smiling.

'There is another thing,' continued Miss Chevening hurriedly. 'Perhaps, as you seem to take such an interest in him, you may be feeling a little uncomfortable about leaving him to my tender mercies? You need not be. I hope we shall not have to be here very much longer, but, while we are, I will be as good to him as I can possibly be expected to be. There!'

'I am sure you will not regret it.'

'Are you? I am not—but never mind. And you *do* believe a little more in me than you did, don't you?'

What could he do but protest? And just then, too, his belief in her was clouded by no mistrust. It was impossible to look at her as she stood there and think a harsh thought of her.

'Then—that is all, and—mother is waiting for me in the *salon*; I must go in now, Mr. Orme. We may not meet again before you go to-morrow, so will you shake hands—just to show we are friends again?'

'I am only too glad that you will let me be your friend—now and always,' he said, as he held her hand for an instant, and then she went within, leaving him less reconciled to his approaching departure than she had found him, and yet with a consolatory glow at his heart. He would go away now with a memory of her marred by no touch of bitterness; it was an episode in his life, and it was finished, but it would be long before he forgot it, and as often as he recalled it, it would always be with the same tantalising wonder whether he had just escaped delicious happiness or exquisite misery.

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The next morning Miss Chevening, who had been one of the party who saw Nugent Orme off, stood by the lighthouse, following the steamer as it crossed the bay to Havre, until it became indistinguishable against the blurred smoke and sparkle of the quays. She felt a little sad; she had not realised till then how much he had filled her life of late; how interesting it had been, even to differ from him. It gave her a momentary pang to look at the Roches Noires and remember that walk with him the first day. Trouville looked different, somehow, now he had gone—it seemed to have lost its meaning.

‘He went away very sudden at the last,’ said Allen, coming up to her. ‘I’m sorry he had to go like that: aren’t you, Miss Chevening?’

Miss Chevening made a diplomatic reply to the effect that there was always something rather melancholy in seeing people off, even if they were almost strangers.

‘Why, you couldn’t call him a stranger!’ cried Allen; ‘you knew him—well, pretty near as well as you do us. You won’t have to see *us* off just yet,’ he added consolingly.

‘It is just possible,’ remarked Margot, ‘that—to spare ourselves all avoidable pain—we may go first.’

‘Or—I say—we might all go together, eh?’ he suggested eagerly.

‘We might, of course, but I don’t see the slightest reason for such an arrangement.’

This could not be called exactly cordial, but it was an effort to her to answer him at all, and she was really putting some control upon herself in doing so at that particular time. But for the joint effect of her promise to Orme and the thought of her mother’s displeasure, she could not have endured Allen as patiently as she did during the following days.

Margot’s regret for Orme was but a passing one; she was heart-whole still, and rather annoyed with herself for indulging even a momentary sentiment. He was only a friend; she did not want him as anything else, she would probably not see him again, and she did not feel particularly unhappy at the thought. Still, she liked thinking of him.

Meanwhile, the Trouville season was drawing to a close; the shrill chorus of laughter and squeaking from the oilskin-capped bathers grew less loud and sustained; it was comparatively easy to get a chair, and even a striped umbrella, on the sands; the company became more *bourgeois*, there were fewer yachtsmen in spotless white Carlist caps, and more stout gentlemen in black alpaca leading very small dogs adorned with immense rosettes. In the hotels the *tables d’hôte* contracted as fast as the famous *peau de chagrin*, and the survivors made gloomy jests on their reduced numbers; strips of bedside carpet were protruded, like bilious tongues, from the upper windows, and in the toy villas along the *plage* all the crimson blinds were drawn, and the Swiss verandahs deserted.

As a further sign, Margot and her mother, driving out one afternoon with the two Chadwicks, met the head-waiter of the Californie and his two principal assistants all mounted on spirited horses, with which they seemed none of them to be on the closest terms.

'Why, that's the fellow who brings me my wine,' cried Chadwick; 'he'll be grassed if he doesn't look out, to a dead certainty.'

'None of them can ride a little bit,' said Allen; 'regular muffs—look, that one has lost his stirrup!'

'You talk as if you knew something about it,' said Margot suavely. 'Do you ride?'

Her benevolent intention of putting him out of countenance failed for once.

'Oh yes,' he said. 'I'm very fond of it. I ride every day at home.'

This statement, while it surprised her, certainly raised him a little in her estimation; she had a great respect for manliness, and had not expected him to possess such an accomplishment as horsemanship. It was lucky for him that she did not know the exact extent and duration of that possession, which might have altered the case.

As it was, she treated him with so much more consideration, that that evening, on returning from their drive, after Chadwick had rallied the equestrian waiters on their riding until he was satisfied he had thoroughly endeared himself to them, and Margot and her mother had reached their rooms, Mrs. Chevening—not very wisely—commended her daughter upon her improved manner towards Allen.

'I am really so pleased to see how nicely you behave to that young Mr. Chadwick now,' she said; 'you've *quite* got over your old objections to him, haven't you, darling Margot?'

'If you ask me, dear,' said Margot calmly, 'I think I dislike and detest him more cordially every day, only I'm tired of showing it.'

'Now that's so ungracious, to spoil it like that, when I was feeling so happy about it all, too!'

'Happy? But *why* should you be happy about it, mother?' inquired Margot, as she drew the pin out of her hat and turned round suddenly.

'Is it very unnatural that I should like to see my daughter on—on pleasant terms with the son of someone who is becoming almost an intimate friend?'

'You have a stronger reason than that, dear,' she said. 'Tell me what it is.'

'You say such odd things at times,' protested Mrs. Chevening. 'What stronger reason could I have?'

'Ah, you forget I am grown-up! I can't help putting things together, and seeing that you are letting yourself build hopes on what may come of this friendship.'

'How dare you——!' Mrs. Chevening was beginning, when her daughter stopped her.

'Now it's no use, mother dear; you know as well as I do that you have been thinking what a good thing it would be if that dreadful young boor were to pay me the honour of proposing to me. Thank goodness, such an idea has never occurred to him—he wouldn't dare to even conceive it! but if he did; oh, if he did, do you suppose I would ever consent for anything in the world—why, mother, I simply couldn't!'

'Well, my dear,' said her mother, after a pause, 'there's no occasion to excite yourself over it. He has not asked you yet, and there will be time enough to do so when he does.'

'He will be a very foolish youth indeed if he ever does; but, so long as you quite understand, the rest is his affair. Luckily, there is very little time left him, for I suppose we shan't stay here much longer? Everybody is going; even the Spooners leave the day after to-morrow. When shall *we* go, dear?'

'When I think proper, my love,' was the unsatisfactory reply.

'It must be expensive, staying here, surely?' said Miss Chevening, pouting.

'That, again, is entirely my affair.'

Miss Chevening shrugged her shoulders as she prepared to leave the room.

'Very well, mother dear, only I warn you I can't go on behaving nicely for ever. I can't guarantee that my patience shall last many days more—he must not try me too far, that is all.'

Mrs. Chevening made no answer; when her daughter was gone she went to the window and threw open the wooden shutters as if she felt the need of air. 'If she would only be sensible!' she mused aloud; 'if she will only see things in the proper light—but I am afraid of her—yes, I am afraid of her spoiling everything!'

Margot was by no means satisfied with this conversation; it was disagreeable, for one thing, to know that their stay at Trouville—of which place she was heartily tired—was still indefinitely prolonged, but she had other reasons for disquietude. She could place but little confidence in her mother, who, indolent and rather shiftless as she was in most things, was capable occasionally of devising, and even following out, a tortuous policy with surprising energy and persistency. And for some time Margot had had an instinctive misgiving that her mother was working to secure Allen Chadwick as a son-in-law, and that she already had his father's assent and co-operation.

This was not in any way alarming to Miss Chevening, who felt a calm reliance in her own power to withstand all arguments, prayers, or pressure; but it made her very indignant that her own mother should know her so little. And then she felt that she herself must have encouraged the delusion lately by her milder demeanour towards this youthful Orson, which was more exasperating than anything else. *That* mistake, at all events, she resolved she would avoid for the future.

So that when, that same evening, she found herself, as was her nightly fate, walking by Allen's side behind their respective parents to the Casino, she was once more in her most rebellious mood. How much longer, she wondered wearily, would this go on? How long before he gave her the chance of refusing him; he had assumed none of the airs of a wooer as yet—the fact being that he stood in far too much awe of her.

'I chaffed those waiter chaps in fine style,' he was saying; 'did you hear me, Miss Chevening, eh?'

'You gave me every opportunity of hearing you,' she replied.

He had passed the head-waiter in the entrance hall, and, in imitation of his father, had been facetious at his expense.

'You don't think he minded what I said, eh? *do you?*' he asked, struck by her tone into sudden misgivings; 'he grinned like blazes.'

'I dare say it afforded him exquisite amusement,' said Margot, but if you don't mind, I shall be grateful if you will choose any other time for amusing head-waiters with merry jests of that kind than when you happen to be with me.'

'Why, I only asked him——' he began.

'Will you please be quiet?' said Miss Chevening, with a very dangerous distinctness. 'I am not at all in a good temper this evening. I would rather not be talked to just now, really.' He glanced at her sideways, scarcely believing she was serious, but the glimpse he had of her drawn eyebrows and the ominous compression of her lower lip gave him, though he was not wise, temporary wisdom to follow her advice until they reached the Casino.

Arrived there, Mrs. Chevening, after establishing herself with Chadwick on the promenade, playfully suggested that Allen must be pining to lose some money at the Race Game, and that dear Margot was always so amused looking on; she thought perhaps if they would promise not to be very long away, they *might*—And they went in to the Petits Chevaux, Margot calculating that there, at least, she would have less of his conversation.

'Les Petits Chevaux,' perhaps the best known of all French watering-place games, is not a very reckless or ruinous mode of dissipation—at Trouville, at all events. The fact that the Board has no interest at stake ensures that the game is conducted with exemplary fairness; each of the little leaden horses is 'run to win,' and the greatest plunger cannot lose or gain more than a trifling number of francs on each race. To the large number of sportsmen who, to quote one of Mr. Pinero's characters, 'don't know a horse from a ham-sandwich,' Les Petits Chevaux must be a superior kind of race-meeting, with nothing to pay for a stand, and an event run every four minutes instead of every quarter of an hour.

The speculator has always one chance in eight of gaining seven times his stake, which makes the amusement highly popular with all ages, from shaky old gentlemen and raddled old women, to fresh young girls, and even children, who surround the green cloth and

revolving horses as excitedly as if every race were the Derby or the Grand Prix at the very least.

Margot was standing looking on at the scene, which generally amused her for a short time. All the players were so intensely serious over it; there was a desperate scramble to seize a ticket from the rack at the end of the stick with which the croupier went round; bitter jealousies and protestations from the side which he did not happen to visit, for at Trouville there is a limit to the number of tickets sold on each race. The croupiers would ignore dozens of grasping hands, and resist the most bewitching blandishments, with a splendid sense of their own importance; then came the expectant hush as the spring was pulled, and the gaily-coloured 'field' went spinning round and round, gradually to separate, slacken, and stop, one by one, until the umpire triumphantly announced the number of the winner, and the cashier paid all holders of the corresponding ticket. She saw many of the regular visitors, some who came in time for the opening race about half-past eight and stayed till ten or eleven; there was the grim old lady with a mouth like a purse, whose husband paid the francs whilst she pocketed any winnings; there was the old Anglo-Parisian who sat in the front row with lack-lustre eyes and took a chance as seldom as possible; there was the stout person with the pretty face and the bare hands which had such a subtle vulgarity in their movements. Close by were a young married couple trying the effect of a sprig of white heather they had found that morning on the cliff, and a little overdressed child whose mother, in an eccentric hat and toilet, had given her a franc to try her fortune with.

Near Margot was an old Frenchman who, from constant attendance, had come to acquire a profound knowledge of metal horse-flesh; he could tell as soon as the field began to thin which horse would stop first and where, and was equally excited whether he had any money on the race or not. He resembled other sporting prophets in that his anticipations were not invariably corroborated by the result.

'Are you going to have a try, eh?' said Allen to her. 'I'll get you a ticket.' Miss Chevening declined the offer; she objected to being under the slightest obligation to him; her pride, too, made her dislike to join in the undignified scramble for francs in that mixed assembly.

'Well,' said Allen, 'I think I'll have a go in, if you don't mind waiting a bit.'

'Here, *ici*!' he cried, as the croupier went by with his rack and the little saucer underneath for the coins; he snatched a ticket. 'Number three,' he said, 'hasn't won since we've been here. I'm lucky at all this sort of thing. I won a pot the other evening.'

'I can quite imagine that,' said Margot, with a curling lip, 'you are so very careful not to lose, you see.'

'Oh, I've a head on me,' he agreed. 'What's that fellow calling out?'

'He is saying that somebody has not paid for his ticket,' said Margot. 'Not very honourable, if it was done on purpose, was it?'

'Some of these French fellows are up to any dodge,' he answered, and the cashier, having received no reply to his demand for the missing stake, emptied the saucer into his partitioned box with a shrug.

A curly-haired boy with a saintly face, like the type of the pattern orphan in moral engravings, was pushing the horses into position for a new start, and the race began. 'Le quatre est bon!' said the old Frenchman encouragingly to a neighbour, 'le quatre est très bon.'

But No. 4 stops under one of the brass arches on the wrong side of the post. 'Ce sera le sept,' he announced with authority, as No. 7 came gliding nearer and nearer the post. 'Ah, non, il a passé' (with the deepest melancholy), 'il va mourir . . . il est mort!'

'Didn't I tell you!' cried Allen. 'Look at three going as strong as ever, he'll just romp in—you see!'

Margot took no notice of him: 'Ce sera le deux,' said the infallible Frenchman again, 'ou le trois!' he added.

'It's a dead heat,' said Allen, who seemed much excited. 'I do call it cruel luck, don't you?' but she would not answer.

The umpire was measuring the distance from the horses' noses to the post with a piece of string. 'Le trois!' he declared, with a grin, 'l'excellent trois, messieurs et mesdames!' and he gave the unsuccessful No. 2 a contemptuous jerk back to the starting point.

'Here!' shouted Allen to the cashier, 'ici avec la monnaie—c'est moi, j'ai le trois: regardez!'

'I wouldn't excite myself,' said Margot contemptuously; 'they are not likely to cheat you—they play quite fairly!'

'By Jove!' he exclaimed suddenly; 'I half think it was *me* who forgot to put the two francs in—they're in my waistcoat pocket now.'

'I am sure it was you,' said Margot; 'I was watching.'

He laughed: 'I've done them finely,' he said. 'It was "heads I won, tails they lost," and no mistake that time. But I didn't mean to, you know,' he added. 'I was in such a hurry, I didn't notice. I call that a good joke, though, eh?'

'People's ideas of jokes are so different,' said Margot, as he pocketed his winnings. 'Have you won enough?'

'Wait a bit,' he said; 'I must have another shot. Hear what they're calling out. "Qui désire de la monnaie?" I thought we all wanted money—I do!'

'He is only offering small change,' Margot said, as she glanced at him with a weary disgust.

The principal croupier and umpire, who seemed to regard his duties in a frivolous light, was holding up the remaining ticket on

his rack. 'C'est le huit, messieurs, le beau huit, l'excellent huit. Qui veut le huit ?'

'Here, I'll have it,' said Allen, and secured it. 'You saw me pay *that* time!' he remarked to Margot, who had not been listening or attending to anything of this.

Again the innocent-faced boy marshals the field into line and retires meekly to put more tickets into their slits on the racks; again the horses spin round.

Eight, as the experienced Frenchman remarks wisely, is always a sluggish animal, and he is true to his reputation on this occasion, for he comes to a standstill half way from the post.

Allen says, 'No luck this time,' and tears up his ticket, while the other horses are still circulating at various rates of speed. But now occurs a curious turn of fortune—all but two have stopped in the rear of number eight; the survivors are gently nearing the winning-post amidst the keenest interest, their impetus being just sufficient to send them past it, and by the rules of the game, to disqualify them from winning, so that the despised number eight, being now the first on the left side of the post, actually becomes the winner after all.

Allen had torn up his ticket, but the floor was strewn with discarded tickets of all numbers, and he picks up one which bears the winning number, but which is of a different colour from the original.

'Voilà—c'est moi—j'ai gagné!' he bawls, as the cashier—not the person who sold him the ticket paper—looks at it and pushes it aside contemptuously. 'Here!' shouts Allen, 'payez-moi, do you hear? Vite! it's all right, I tell you; this young lady will tell you it's all right. Miss Margot, tell them how it was!'

He looked round as he spoke, and found himself alone.

Outside one of the large glass doors of the saloon devoted to the *Petits Chevaux*, sat Mrs. Chevening and Mr. Chadwick. 'You know,' he had said, as he dropped his cigar ash into the tub of an adjoining orange-tree, 'I don't pretend that boy of mine is as smart as I should like to see him, but I'm not going to have him looked down on.'

'But indeed,' murmured Mrs. Chevening, with her eyes upon the slanted spears which supported the canvas above the band-kiosk, and which now stood bare against the starlight, 'indeed, dear Mr. Chadwick, it is so very unlikely that anyone could do that. And when he has been a little more in the society of nice English girls—'

'Well,' he said, 'there's your Miss Margot—she's a nice girl enough, but it strikes me she don't take to him as much as I should like to see.'

'How can you say so!' cried Mrs. Chevening. 'Margot's is such a very peculiar nature, so slow in according her friendship—there she is like me—but *most* loyal when her friendship has once been given! I could tell you many instances which would quite convince you

that she and your Allen are admirable friends now—you must have noticed how constantly they are together. I assure you, I never remember her allowing anyone to monopolise her society before. I was quite surprised.'

'They are a good deal together,' he admitted. 'I suppose, as you say so, they get on better than they seem to.'

'Surely you must see for yourself how much his manners have altered for the better—it is a little education in itself, being really intimate with a frank, fresh, highbred girl as, although I am her mother, I can't help seeing that she is; and there is no idea of anything but ordinary friendship on either side. Margot is quite free from any foolish desire to turn a boy's head—you need not be afraid of that.'

'If she chose to turn it, and marry him, I don't know that I should have much to say against it,' said Chadwick; 'but I daresay that wouldn't suit *you*—you don't mind associating with us out here, but if it came to any talk of more, why, it would be good-night, I suppose?'

'You are very, *very* unjust!' said Mrs. Chevening. 'Who am I to have any ridiculous notions of that sort? Can you possibly imagine—I—I—You evidently do not understand the value I put upon our acquaintance. I have been quite dreading to think how soon it would be over!'

'How over?' asked Chadwick. 'We're not so very far from London, where you live. I shall run up now and then, if I don't take a house in town for the season next year. It needn't be over, unless you like.'

'People always *say* that,' she returned; 'but you will have found other friends in your county before that time, and you will soon think it a bore to come all the way to Chiswick to call on us. I am sure Margot will miss her friend Allen—she is so very constant, poor dear.'

'Do you mean what you're saying?' he replied, bending forward; 'because——'

But Mrs. Chevening was not destined to hear the conclusion of this sentence; for just at that moment a shadow fell between them, and, as they looked up, they saw Margot standing by the orange tree. 'Mr. Chadwick,' she said, with a calmness which seemed to cost her some effort, 'I think you had better go to your son. He is making rather a disturbance in there.'

'Eh, what? Allen!' said Chadwick, rising. 'What is the matter?'

'You had better ask him,' said Margot; 'but there is really no time to be lost.'

He went in at once, and Margot caught her mother's arm: 'Let us go, mother, quick—before they come back! I can't speak to him, I can't!' she said hurriedly. Her eyebrows were contracted, and her eyes looked dark and excited in the glare that came through the open doors. Mrs. Chevening saw at once that

something was very wrong indeed. 'Don't ask me about it here—let us go, let us get away from this place first!' said Margot.

'You will certainly be better at home,' said her mother, suppressing her displeasure as well as she might, as they went down by the steps from the terrace, and one of the black-liveried and silver-chained *huissiers* obsequiously let them through the gate.

When they were walking along the planks in the darkness, Mrs. Chevening said: 'Now, perhaps, you will tell me what this means?'

'He tried to cheat, mother!' cried Margot. '*Twice!* I thought it might be a mistake the first time—but the second they found him out, and he dared—he dared to try to get *me* to screen him!'

'What did you say to him? What did you do?'

'I? Nothing. I left him and came to you; and he was making such a scene—everyone was looking at us! Oh, mother, if you knew how ashamed I feel to have been there!'

Margot's indignation and disgust were not unnatural under the circumstances, for, as it happened, the number which Allen had drawn on the occasion had not attracted her attention. She had heard him say his horse had lost and had seen him tear up his ticket, and so she was horrified to see him pick up another and present it as if he had won.

Policy induced Mrs. Chevening to take a charitable and, though she did not suspect it, a correct view of the matter. 'You must have been mistaken,' she said; 'it is absurd to imagine that a young man who has plenty of pocket-money, as I know, would cheat for a few paltry francs!'

'I am not mistaken,' said Margot. 'I was there and saw it. If he has plenty it makes it all the worse. I am not surprised; I knew he was like that. I forced myself to endure him because you wished it; you will not ask me to humiliate myself any longer after this. You will not, will you?'

'I am sure it can all be explained,' said Mrs. Chevening.

'If you like to listen to any explanations, of course he may give them, but not to *me*. I will never speak to him again. I mean it, mother. I have borne it too long. You must tell him not to expect that I shall take the slightest notice of him.'

'That is absurd!' said her mother. 'How can you avoid it in a place like this?'

'I will avoid it. I will keep in my room rather than see him and have to speak to him. If he meets me and dares to behave as if nothing had happened, he shall know what I think of him!' declared angry Margot.

'Then, my dear,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'you will do more mischief than you have any idea of.'

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNEXPECTED DELIVERANCE.

O, he's as tedious
 As is a tired horse, a railing wife ;
 Worse than a smoky house :—I had rather live
 With cheese and garlic in a windmill, far,
 Than feed on cakes, and have him talk to me !

Henry IV. Part I. Act 3.

Gone, and the light gone with her, and left me in shadow here !

Gone—flitted away,

Taken the stars from the night and the sun from the day !

The Window.

MRS. CHEVENING said no more just then, and Margot, having given expression to her long pent-up indignation, was wise enough to remain content, so that they reached the Californie in silence. Two tired waiters, possibly the equestrians of that afternoon, were reposing on the divans in the hall, and rose guiltily as they entered. As Margot sat opposite her mother in the lift she thought how sharp and haggard her features looked. 'I'm tired, mother,' she said, as soon as they were alone in the sitting-room of their suite ; 'and I'm sure you are. I think I'll go to bed at once.'

'You will stay for a few minutes, if you please,' said Mrs. Chevening, as she untied her evening cloak with hands that were not as steady as usual. 'I want to talk to you a little first, about—about the Chadwicks.'

Margot sat down with a resigned air. 'Haven't we talked about them enough ?' she protested.

'I want to know if you were serious in what you said down there. Am I to understand that you mean to decline all intercourse whatever with that boy—or what ?'

'I should like to, but I suppose I can't really do that without a fuss. I shall certainly refuse to go anywhere alone with him.'

'You know perfectly well that I have never wished you to do that at any time—I have always been close at hand.'

'But I have had to walk with him, to sit next to him, listen to him,' cried Margot impetuously. 'I will not do that any more.'

'You mean to show him publicly that you do not consider him fit to speak to you ?'

'He is *not* fit to speak to me,' she said proudly. 'Even if this had never happened, mother, you must know really that I ought not to be forced to treat him as an equal ; his very accent is enough, he is hopelessly common and underbred. I bore everything till to-night ; but can you wish me to let myself be seen with someone who has been found out cheating in a public place like that ?'

'I will spare you all future annoyance from him,' said Mrs.

Chevening, 'but I must have your promise that you will act sensibly about this. The poor young man has been badly brought up, and that is very deplorable, no doubt, but we ought to pity him. I can't believe myself that you have not been mistaken in what you thought you saw; but think of his poor father's feelings if you humiliate his son as you seem bent upon doing.'

'Is it my fault if he behaves so as to deserve it?' she said.

'Mr. Chadwick may be a valuable friend to us some day,' retorted her mother. 'You know nothing of the world, Margot, nor how every year makes it more difficult for me to live and keep out of debt. Your brother and sisters are growing up, and I lie awake night after night, wondering how I am to provide for them all, and what will become of them if anything happens to me. But you think nothing of anyone but yourself—you leave me to make all the sacrifices, to bear all the burden alone—you will do nothing to help!'

'Does that mean,' Margot exclaimed, 'that you hope Mr. Chadwick will lend you money? Surely we have not sunk to that!'

'You must mean to insult me by even suggesting such a thing!' said Mrs. Chevening passionately. 'How am I to make you understand that it is your duty to me, to your brother and sisters, to obey me in what I ask? You must not allow this young man to see any difference in your manner, do you hear, you must not! I must have your promise before you leave the room.'

Margot's hands were entwining themselves feverishly upon the gaudy velvet table-cover. 'Mother dear,' she said earnestly, 'it's no use; if I gave a promise I could not keep it, it is asking too much—it is indeed! I know what you want; you are hoping that I might bring myself some day to accept him. I told you before that I could not do that—not even for you and the others. You must give up the idea—nothing would ever make me listen for a single moment!'

'Am I to tell you again,' said her mother impatiently, 'that I am not asking you to do anything of the sort? I simply ask you to have a little charity, a little patience, not to do or say anything that can make any breach. Come, you will not be so obstinate and unreasonable as to refuse that?'

It seemed to Margot that if she did not make a stand then, she would find herself pledged to more than she could fulfil. She felt absolutely unable to promise to restrain the contempt she felt for Allen Chadwick after what had happened—it was not right that she should be called upon to do so.

'I do refuse,' she said firmly. 'I detest him, and I wish him to know that I do.'

'Then,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'I will not keep you here. You shall go back to-morrow.'

If she had any hope of impressing her daughter by this threat, she was undeceived.

Do you mean it—really mean it?’ cried Margot. ‘Go back to Littlehampton to-morrow and see the children again—get away from those two Chadwicks? Mother, it sounds too delightful to be true!’

‘Delightful or not,’ replied her mother frostily, ‘I mean what I say. I shall go with you as far as Honfleur to-morrow, and see you on board the Littlehampton boat, so you had better have all your things ready in time for the mid-day diligence.’

‘Then you are not going to Littlehampton, too?’ cried Margot in surprise.

‘Certainly not, at present. I am very well content with Trouville, and I can trust myself, though it seems I cannot trust my daughter, to stay for a few days without insulting people who are only anxious to be our friends. It is no pleasure to me to travel any distance with a disobedient, ungrateful girl, I assure you.’

Margot tried to assume a proper degree of concern, but in her joy at this un hoped-for escape, it is to be feared that her mother’s displeasure did not cloud her spirits very perceptibly, and her chief alarm that night was lest Mrs. Chevening should change her mind by morning.

But that lady was evidently in earnest; she secured places by the diligence and sent off a telegram to Miss Henderson, her governess, at the earliest possible moment, and so managed matters that Margot and she were on the top of the shabby old Honfleur diligence, which was toiling up the hill above Trouville at the very time when Mr. Chadwick and his son were searching for them diligently on the sands.

Margot drew a deep breath of relief as they came out on the level road along the cliff. Behind lay Trouville and Deauville, glancing and shining in the sun. Pleasant as were some of the memories they held, her more recent experiences made her anxious to turn her back on them; there she could just make out the imposing mass of the Casino at the landward end of the long curved jetties with the white lighthouses, as it all lay spread out below. Devoutly she thanked Providence that she would never again be compelled to walk through those rooms under Allen Chadwick’s escort. And on her left was the sparkling blue sea, which she would cross that night to find herself by morning at Littlehampton, with Ida and Reggie, and her favourite Lettice. What a relief the placid respectability of that not too lively watering-place would be after Trouville! So she mused, and her spirits grew lighter and lighter as the diligence jingled drowsily along under the branching trees, through Hennequeville with its little church, where Margot had seen the model votive ships hanging up from the dim rafters, past Villerville with its narrow empty streets of tall houses, and down into hilly Honfleur.

The Littlehampton steamer was lying alongside one of the quays, and was to start at dusk, and Mrs. Chevening, who had preserved an injured silence throughout the drive, secured a passage, and

Margot and she had a parting meal, which neither found an agreeable one, at one of the hotels before going on board the boat.

‘I must leave you now,’ said Mrs. Chevening coldly. ‘I wish you had not compelled me to send you away in this manner, but I have spoken to the stewardess, and Miss Henderson will meet you at Littlehampton, so you will be safe enough. Good-bye, Margot. I hope on reflection you will see how foolish and wrong you have been.’

‘Good-bye, dear,’ said Margot, a little piteously. ‘Don’t be angry with me, and—and you will be with us very soon, won’t you?’

‘You will hear—that is, I shall let Miss Henderson know when to expect me.’ And Mrs. Chevening, after going on board the packet and confiding Margot to the care of the stewardess with a recommendation to keep as much in the ladies’ cabin as possible, departed to catch the return diligence to Trouville. She did not altogether like leaving her in this way, but she had no other course unless she quitted Trouville, too, which did not suit her convenience. Margot, besides, was perfectly capable of taking care of herself, and the governess would be on the quay to meet her next morning.

Margot was conscious of being in disgrace, and though she was too proud to show it, she felt the frigidity with which her mother took leave of her. Still her chief sensation was always relief—relief at the knowledge that by to-morrow she would have put the Channel between herself and her incubus, Allen Chadwick. She could not repent of the firmness which had procured her release. And then she was going to her family, the sisters and brother who were more to her than anyone else in the world. So that, before the steamer left the harbour, Miss Chevening had forgotten all that was unpleasant and fallen asleep in a state of perfect contentment.

Nowhere on Trouville sands could Mr. Chadwick discern the becoming foulard costume which was Mrs. Chevening’s usual morning dress. He felt a little lost without a companion to whom he had grown so accustomed, and his son did not succeed in consoling him for the deprivation.

At *déjeuner* she and her daughter were absent from their usual places, but still he merely thought that they were away on some excursion for the day. ‘If she’d told me she wanted to go anywhere,’ he repeated, ‘we could have all gone together.’ Allen said nothing for some time, until, late in the afternoon, he put into words a fear that had been growing. ‘You don’t think they’ve gone for good?’ he suggested.

‘Without so much as a good-bye, after the way we’ve been about together?’ said his father. ‘No, I certainly don’t think that. But it’s odd, because at the Casino last night——’

‘Do you think she—they were angry with me for having that row with the cashier chap?’ said Allen flushing. ‘That was when I last saw Miss Margot. I looked round, and she was gone. I’ve been wondering why ever since.’

Do you know why she went, eh? She came to tell me you were in a mess of some sort, and ask me to go to you. What do you think of *that*? She was as flustered and eager as if you'd been her own brother. I believe she thought the establishment were going to do something very bad to you!

A great weight was off Allen's mind; he was overjoyed to hear for the first time that stately Miss Chevening had concerned herself on his account; it gave a new fervour to his devotion. He had been tormenting himself with fantastic fears that she had resented his playing at the *Petits Chevaux*, and had gone away in disgust.

'So she *did* stay, till that began?' he exclaimed. 'I wish she had seen the finish of it. Why, they gave in directly they saw I was the only claimant. I wasn't going to see them do me out of my winnings, no fear, if I *had* torn up the ticket!'

'Well, you can tell her all about it at dinner to-night. She regularly frightened me at first. I expected to find you in for a duel—pistols or swords—first thing in the morning! She was so upset she got her mother to take her home at once, and that's how we missed them.'

But at the *table d'hôte* that evening Mr. Chadwick found one of the waiters drawing back Mrs. and Miss Chevening's chairs for two strangers. 'Here, *garçon*, hold on,' he said; 'those two are engaged—those ladies, who always sit here—you know that well enough.'

'Pardon, but they have leave; they have their baggages by the omnibus for the diligence to Honfleur this morning. I was to see them depart,' said the waiter with a grin.

Mr. Chadwick was plainly highly disconcerted by this information, though he passed it off at the time. 'All right,' he said; 'it's all the same to me—don't like seeing people turned out of their proper seats, that's all.'

But afterwards he waxed exceedingly bitter over it to Allen. 'I can't understand it,' he said over and over again; 'it beats me. I suppose I've been away from England so long. But if ever a woman regularly went out of her way to be friendly she did. And the money I've spent to make things pleasant and agreeable for her! Not that I grudge it, that's neither here nor there, but to go off without a word or even a line to say she was sorry to have to go, or hoped we might meet again, or anything of the sort! If that's Society manners, all I can say is, no more fine ladies for me! Just make use of you as long as it's convenient, and then throw you off like one of their gloves! I'm downright disgusted with the pair of them. I thought they had more gratitude!'

'Perhaps they couldn't help themselves—I mean, going away so suddenly,' suggested Allen; it was what he wanted to believe himself, and anything that was a reflection on Margot gave him a curious pain. The suggestion, however, drew down his father's anger upon his own head.

'Couldn't help themselves? You don't know what you are

talking about! I tell you they could have helped themselves if they'd chosen to. And now I come to think of it, it's as likely as not that that precious affair at the Casino last night did the business!'

'But,' stammered Allen, 'didn't you say Miss Margot came and told you to come to me? There was no disgrace in what I did!'

'The mother may have got hold of some garbled account. She's a proud-tempered woman, and naturally she wouldn't like her daughter to be seen going about with a fellow who'd got himself mixed up in a public row at the Casino. About a few paltry francs, too!' he burst out, allowing his wrath to escape by this convenient channel. 'I wish to God you could break yourself of these low ways and behave more like a gentleman! I'd have paid you the money ten times over sooner than have this happen! What's the good of my going and making acquaintances if you drive 'em out of the place?'

This was the first time that Mr. Chadwick had spoken to his son in anger, and the first time, also, that he had ever seemed to show any consciousness of his son's deficiencies. Allen was silent, stunned almost by this tirade, but what affected him chiefly was a terrible fear that his father was right.

The blow had been bitter enough as it was; he could hardly realise even yet that he had lost his beautiful companion without the slightest warning, but the thought that his own folly was the cause was intolerable. Yet he made no effort to defend himself; he felt a singular reluctance to speaking of Miss Chevening to his father at all, and he dreaded lest, if he said anything more, he might be compelled to give up the last lingering hope that he had had no share in bringing about her sudden departure.

Miss Chevening had been, for her, quite gracious of late, and he had never—luckily for his peace of mind—suspected the dislike and contempt that lay beneath her passive endurance of him. As he became more at ease with her, he found himself able to talk, and her replies gave him no impression other than that she was a little absent-minded sometimes.

So that Allen, for the first time in his life, had passed a sort of enchanted existence, privileged to accompany, day after day, this lovely princess who hardly seemed to belong to ordinary life, and whom he did not expect to treat him quite as an equal. It was enough for him that she allowed him to be with her, spoke to him now and then of her own accord, and smiled, ever so indifferently, on rare occasions.

She was gone. All the people and things he saw had associations of some kind with her. He noted them inwardly as he walked on by his father's side, and at each he felt his heart grow sorer and heavier, and he hardly heard the elder man's stormy reproaches as his anger vented itself in rapid alternation upon Mrs. Chevening, her daughter, and his son. Anyone who had seen the pair walking along the resounding boards would have noticed no more than

a high-coloured, loose-mouthed man apparently lecturing a sulky, common-looking youth, who appeared absolutely unimpressed, and impenitent. Of the utter blankness, the inward dragging pain that Allen was feeling, he gave and could give no sign whatever.

So throughout the remainder of that miserable day Mr. Chadwick indulged his feelings, and Allen listened with a sense that nothing mattered very much now; he would almost rather have been still drudging away at his desk in the city warehouse than suffer the desolation that had come upon him.

The next morning when they came in to *déjeuner*, Mr. Chadwick still occupied with his grievance, there sat Mrs. Chevening in her usual place, fresh and smiling and serene! Allen felt his heart leap. Had a miracle happened, then? Would he see Margot again after all?

His father stared as if he had seen a ghost. He could not throw off his resentment all at once—it had struck too deep. He nodded brusquely as he sat down.

‘They told me here you’d left Trouville,’ he said. ‘Did you think better of it, or what?’

‘Surely you had a better opinion of me than that!’ cried Mrs. Chevening, plaintively. ‘As if I should have gone away altogether without thanking you for all your kindness. What *must* you think of me?’

‘Well, so long as you’re not gone,’ said Chadwick, his face clearing. ‘We couldn’t think, my boy and I, what had become of you all yesterday.’

‘It was all so very sudden,’ said Mrs. Chevening, who had prepared herself for this emergency. ‘You know I have left my younger darlings at Littlehampton, in lodgings, my second child is so delicate. Well, only yesterday morning, Margot had a letter in which Ida begged her so pathetically not to stay away much longer that Margot insisted that she must be worse and begged to go at once. Dear Margot is so perfectly devoted to Ida, and she to her, and so, though it was quite absurd, as I told her, and I really couldn’t leave Trouville myself so soon, unless I was wanted, I saw it would be too cruel to keep Margot, and I took her over to Honfleur and put her on board the boat for Littlehampton. Poor darling, it was only her sense of duty made her go. She was quite sorry to go when it came to parting!’

Like many of Mrs. Chevening’s mis-statements, this contained a certain amount of truth. There *had* been a letter, which came as they were starting, and which expressed Ida’s longing for her sister’s return.

Allen’s hopes subsided as quickly as they had risen, and yet his worst fears were relieved—she had not left on his account.

‘Sorry she deserted us like that,’ said his father; ‘but very creditable to her, I’m sure. Allen will have to amuse himself alone now.’

Dear Margot was so anxious that I should explain,’ said her

mother mendaciously. 'She quite hoped to have seen him before leaving. I was to deliver all manner of kind messages. She is so warmhearted; she felt so afraid of seeming ungrateful, and I think she will miss her Trouville companion,' she added graciously.

Allen coloured to the eyes. 'I shall miss *her*, ma'am,' he said awkwardly; but he was almost consoled—she had remembered him, she liked him better than she had let him see, then—he fell into a rapture of adoration at the thought.

Later, when he had gone, and Mr. Chadwick was sitting with Mrs. Chevening alone in the big hall, he said, still a little suspiciously, 'What made you leave the Casino the other evening so suddenly?'

Mrs. Chevening had her answer ready. 'It was very foolish of me,' she said, 'but Margot was so terribly upset—she thought Allen was in some trouble, and I really had to take her home. You know—or perhaps you don't know—that she almost looks upon him as a sort of big brother, she was so interested in him from the very first. I hope,' she ventured, feeling herself on rather delicate ground, 'that there was no—no quarrel or unpleasantness?'

'Lord, no!' said Mr. Chadwick; 'it was their mistake—they acknowledged it before I came up'—and he explained how the affair had ended.

'Poor Allen!' Mrs. Chevening commented; 'how insolent these croupier men are! Margot will be so anxious to hear how it ended, she spoke of nothing else all the evening. How clever of him to insist on his rights and not let himself be cheated!'

'Oh, he's a smart chap—in some ways,' said his father, in whose opinion Allen was now quite restored. 'That's where a business training comes in, you see; makes 'em know the value of money, and take care they're not done. So your Miss Margot was making herself unhappy about it, eh? Well, I like that. I didn't think, between ourselves, she took so much interest in him.'

'You don't know Margot! She does not easily attach herself, but when her liking is once gained—it may sound conceited to say so, but I do think *any* young man might be proud to have my daughter for a friend. She is not easy to please. Perhaps you noticed that she would scarcely have anything to say to that Mr. Orme, clever and self-confident as he was?'

'I don't know that I noticed one way or the other,' said Mr. Chadwick bluntly; 'but you don't think there's any chance that Allen might—eh?'

'No,' said Mrs. Chevening; 'oh, dear no; pray don't imagine that for an instant—it is quite what I said; she looks upon him as a big brother, who has never had a sister of his own—a sister can do so much for a young man. I always think, you know, that nothing can *quite* supply the want of female influence in a boy's life.'

'He had his aunt,' said Mr. Chadwick; 'but I know what you mean, he *is* rough, poor chap; he don't feel at home in a drawing-

room, even alone with me. I wish I could see my way clearer, for my sake, as well as his!' He said no more at the time—but Mrs. Chevening knew that her words had not been lost upon him.

Margot was able to sleep on board the steamer, which is more than she would have done had she foreseen the kind of colour with which her secession would be invested by her mother's policy. She woke early, however, and went on deck, eager to see the familiar coast-line once more; and, as she reached the top of the brass-edged steps, she saw a face she did not immediately recognise, though its owner had evidently a better memory. 'You know me well enough, miss, though it may not suit you to own to it,' said the woman, and at the voice Margot knew at once that she had had the ill-tempered nursemaid Susan for a fellow-passenger.

Susan was looking, and knew she was looking, woefully green and dishevelled beside Margot, whose face even in the raw morning air, was almost as fresh and fair as if she had never left the shore. Perhaps this gave an additional acerbity to the maid's manner. 'I've reason enough to remember you, miss,' she added, 'and I shan't forget you in a hurry.'

'I remember you perfectly,' said Margot. 'If the sight of me reminds you to treat your unfortunate charge more kindly, I hope you never will forget me,' and she was about to turn away and think no more of it, but the girl placed herself in her way, and Margot saw that she was trembling with passion.

'I wouldn't be a nippercrit, miss,' she said. 'I'd have the courage of my opinions, I would.'

Miss Chevening's eyes opened to their haughtiest width. 'I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about,' she said in her low incisive tones; 'but you needn't explain, I don't want to know in the least.'

'Ah, but I want you to know,' said Susan. 'You don't take *me* in with your innocent ways and pretended ignorance. You look a proud one, but you don't think it beneath you to hound a poor girl out of her place behind her back. My missis, as was a lady if ever there was one, though French, she'd never have give me notice but for tale-tellers coming telling lies against me. I know better, don't talk to me!'

'I don't intend to,' said Margot.

'No, you can't face me—that's how it is,' said Susan, sticking her hands into the pockets of her smart ulster. 'No wonder, taking the bread out of my mouth as you have, and anomalous too—so mean!'

Miss Chevening began to be afraid that a crowd would collect round them, but fortunately the few passengers who were on deck had gone forward, and Susan's voice, which was growing louder and more violent, was drowned by the din and carried aft by the breeze.

'Listen to me, you foolish girl,' said Margot. 'If your mistress

has sent you away for not treating her son properly, it is only what you deserve and I am glad of it. Still, if you have no friends to go to and want help while you are looking for another place, I would willingly——'

'Take your money after what you've done!' said the girl. 'I'd rather die in the workhouse. Luckily for me, I'm in no want of friends nor money neither, so you won't undo what you've done that way. You must feel yourself you've acted shabby, or you wouldn't make such a offer!'

Margot's patience gave way at this. 'You are an ungrateful idiot,' she said contemptuously, 'or you wouldn't have such ideas at all; but if it gives you any comfort to believe that I accused you secretly, go on believing it by all means, it can make no difference to me, only be so good as to leave me in peace.'

'That's an easy way to put it off,' said Susan; 'but, never mind, perhaps some day your turn'll come, and you'll see how you like such treatment. I've said all I mean to say, and, now you know what I think of you, I'll say good morning and thanks for past favours received and may I live to see 'em returned!'

Margot was indignant though a little amused, too, that this unamiable girl should regard her as an anonymous persecutor, but she was too supremely indifferent to dream of trying to convince the ex-nurse of her mistake, and perhaps to attempt it might have been trouble thrown away. So Susan landed and went on her way, more firmly convinced than ever that she owed the loss of her situation with the wealthy Parisians to Margot Chevening—instead, as was actually the case, to one of her foreign fellow-servants.

CHAPTER IX.

A CLOUD FROM ACROSS THE SEA.

It was a week since Margot's abrupt departure from Normandy, and as yet her mother had fixed no date for rejoining her family at Littlehampton, nor for their general return to London. She had written, it was true, but only to Miss Henderson, and to the effect that the lodgings should be retained until she wrote again. 'It's too bad of mother to keep us in this poky little place,' Ida declared fretfully. 'I am quite strong again now, and I'm sure there's nothing here to stay for longer than one can possibly help.' They were walking along the shore towards Worthing—Margot, Ida, and Miss Henderson—and as she spoke Ida turned and looked back at the row of lodging-houses, the windmills, and the unassuming little jetty and lighthouse, which, gilded by the September haze, comprised the main features of Littlehampton. 'Ida, darling,' protested the governess, 'don't be ungrateful—remember what you were when you came and what you are now.' There was nothing of the invalid

in Ida Chevening's appearance just then. Tall—a little too tall, perhaps, for a girl of sixteen—she promised a figure as faultless as her elder sister's when her strength should be completely regained, and the transitionary period was passed. She would be beautiful, too, though her face would never have the animation and decision which made Margot's so difficult to forget. She was indolent and somewhat weak by nature, and delicate health had encouraged her disposition to cling to others. She was impulsive, and, perhaps from being so much in Miss Henderson's company, decidedly sentimental, not to say affected. Miss Henderson was the type of governess least fitted for the charge of a girl of Ida's age and disposition. She was young and produced a first impression of being good-looking—Ida thought her lovely, and was constantly assuring her of the fact. She had a few showy accomplishments, no solid education. She knew how to behave, especially when Mrs. Chevening was present, but it was always behaviour, not breeding, as her patroness perceived clearly enough, though she saw no reason for parting with her on that account. 'Henderson was useful and cheap; she made no inconvenient fuss when her salary was (as happened not infrequently) in arrears; the children liked her, she would do well enough,' thought Mrs. Chevening, who, in fact, could not afford to risk a change. But between Margot and Miss Henderson there was always a certain distance: Miss Chevening instinctively disliking certain slight but unmistakable indications of underbreeding which revealed themselves in the other's more unguarded moments, and the governess perceiving and resenting a coolness which she chose to ascribe to jealousy.

Ida, however, was an enthusiastic heroine-worshipper, and saw no shortcomings. 'If I'm well now,' she said in answer to Miss Henderson's last remonstrance, 'I owe it all to you, dear darling Hennie. I believe I should have died if it hadn't been for you!'

'You were certainly very ill when we came, and that night I sat up with you was an awfully anxious one for us all, dearest Ida,' said the governess. 'That was after you had gone to Trouville,' she explained to Margot.

'I think it was a pity you did not tell us at the time, then,' said Margot. 'The doctor assured us that you were quite out of danger, Ida, or I would never have left you.'

'I wouldn't have you told,' said Ida. 'You mustn't blame poor Hennie.' And she took the governess's hand and fondled it affectionately. To Margot, who had considerable doubts of any real relapse at all, this seemed unhealthy and exaggerated, but she was too deeply attached to her sister to be capable of saying a word to check her effusions, and besides it would only weaken such influence as she still retained over Ida.

'But I am longing to get away from this place,' continued Ida presently; 'it is too horridly slow. Don't you hate it, Margot? But no—I believe you actually *like* it!'

'I believe I actually do,' said Margot, laughing, and she spoke

the truth. After all the bustle and glare of Trouville, there was something restful and quieting in the unpretentious little Sussex watering-place, to say nothing of the unspeakable relief she felt at her deliverance from Allen Chadwick. And it was such a lovely afternoon, with a lazy purple sea lapping far away, and the sky above their heads a perfect azure, repeated in the rills which channelled the sands. There was a touch of autumn chill in the air, and the reeds and bushes along the low coast were turning yellow and russet, but she felt braced and invigorated as she trod the elastic sand, on which the gulls had left their footprints in innumerable little tridents. She was too happy just then to remember with any regret that other shore across the sea where she had had one experience at least that she could look back upon without reluctance. But even Nugent Orme had not left an ineffaceable impression on her mind. Any element of romance Trouville might have contained for her had been slain by other recollections, and besides, Mr. Orme was in England somewhere. There was not much to inspire her in that fact, but somehow it filled up the measure of her content in being where she was.

‘I can’t think how you can endure it!’ Ida declared, ‘especially after Trouville. I am sure Trouville must have been lovely. I would never have left it till I was obliged. You never tell us anything about what you did there, Margot. It’s rather mean of you.’

‘There is so very little to tell. I was very glad to get away from it,’ said Margot.

‘But why? It must have been better fun than this. Weren’t the people at the hotel pleasant? Was it *mother*—or what?’

‘Some of the people were—not very pleasant,’ said Margot.

‘Mother wouldn’t know people who were not all right, would she? She’s generally so awfully particular.’

‘She knew these people,’ said Margot. ‘They were quite respectable. He was, or had been, an indigo-planter, I believe, and very well off; but—well, I disliked them.’

‘Was there a Mrs. Indigo-planter?’ inquired Ida; ‘was it she?’

‘There was only this Mr. Chadwick,’ said Margot looking out to sea, ‘and—and his son.’

‘Now we’re beginning to be told something,’ said Miss Henderson, silyly; ‘please go on.’

‘There is nothing to tell, Camilla, as it happens,’ said Margot.

‘But the son made love to you—I’m sure he did, now didn’t he?’

‘Thank goodness, no; he would not have dared,’ said Margot. ‘You are so very romantic, Camilla. But it was quite bad enough as it was; and, if you please, we won’t talk about it any more, it is over now.’

‘Just tell us this, and we won’t want to know any more,’ said Ida. ‘Was he handsome? I’m sure he was handsome—and rather conceited; *wasn’t* he, Margot?’

‘You are quite a witch, dear,’ Margot replied, with rather a malicious little laugh.

'Poor Margot,' said Ida, sympathetically; 'never mind, it will all come right in time.'

'It has come right already,' said Margot, lightly; 'and now suppose we drop the Chadwicks: it is time to turn back.'

They walked back by the shore, and as they reached Littlehampton and were tramping over the shingle to the modest esplanade, a pretty little figure came fluttering down to meet them.

'Why, Lettice,' said Margot, as the child clung to her hand, 'where's nurse?'

'Nurse? Oh, she's playing cricket with Reggie on the green somewhere; she's getting to bowl quite nicely now, you know, though it's a pity she can't bat better. I've been running about with Yarrow, and oh, Margot, I've had quite an adventure! I had been playing cricket with Reggie, but I got him out three times running and he wouldn't *go* (that wasn't fair of him, was it?), so I left him, and then I had the adventure. I was throwing my ball for Yarrow to run after—he wouldn't let me alone till I did—and there was someone—a man, not at all old—lying down on the beach, and—I didn't mean it, but the ball bounced somehow, and, oh, Margot, what *do* you think?—it hit him in the eye! I was *dreadfully* sorry' (Lettice was eight, but she was still a little uncertain about her r's when excited, and had to bear some teasing from her brother in consequence), 'but I went up and apologised directly, of course, and he said he wasn't hurt much (it was the india-rubber ball), and then he asked me my name, so of course I told him, and then' (and here Lettice's golden-brown eyes grew larger) 'he asked if I had a sister called Margot, and told me he knew you quite well, and had met you over in France—*did* he meet you, Margot?'

A sudden consciousness deepened Margot's colour. Could it be? Was Nugent Orme here? Had he come with any idea of finding her, and if he had——?

'I can't tell till I have seen him, can I?' she said. 'Very likely I have met him.'

'That wasn't all,' said Lettice; he asked me—that was when we got more consequential—he asked me "would I mind being his sister some day."'

'He—asked you that?' exclaimed Margot, with a keen resentment. How could Mr. Orme have allowed himself to say such a thing to a child! 'You *must* have misunderstood him, Lettice.'

Lettice shook her head. 'But I didn't, Margot, he said it ever so many times—he told me it was all settled. Only I do *not* understand how I ever can be his sister—do *you*, Margot?'

'No, dear,' said Margot. 'He made a very great mistake if he really told you so.' That Nugent Orme could be guilty of such presumption, should actually take her consent for granted in this way, filled her with the keenest vexation, and yet she found it almost impossible to believe. If it should be true, she felt with some bitterness that whatever place he had begun to occupy in her thoughts would be vacant now. What could she have said or done

to give him such an impression? Well, he would learn that he was less irresistible than he seemed to imagine.

'But what was he like, this mysterious person?' questioned Ida, with a mischievous enjoyment of her elder sister's agitation. 'Describe him, Lettice.'

Description was not Lettice's strong point. 'He was like—well, not like anything in particular,' she said; 'and I'm sure he said that mother and his father had settled it all, and that I was to be his sister soon.'

'His father!' exclaimed Margot, with a sudden illumination. It was *she* who had taken too much for granted, not Nugent Orme, who had probably never given her a second thought since he left Trouville. And the person who made so sure of her consent was her *bête noire*—the raw lad from whose society she thought she had delivered herself for ever.

'It strikes me,' said Miss Henderson to her, 'we have not been told the whole story of your little Trouville romance yet, dear. When are we to know all?'

'Run on to the house and tell them we're coming, Lettice,' said Margot, and waiting till the child had gone, she turned to the governess: 'There is nothing to know,' she said a little haughtily. 'I hate that kind of joking, Camilla. If you saw him, you would understand how it annoys me. But what is the use of talking about it? Nothing that anyone said would change my mind. If this Chadwick boy—for that is all he is—is really here, you will see him for yourselves, sooner or later. Then you will know.'

'A foreign postcard from mother,' announced Reggie, who was already seated at the tea-table. 'She'll be here by the steamer to-morrow, and wants Margot to meet her and nobody else. I wonder why we mayn't *all* go!'

Ida looked at Margot with an almost envious interest; she was to be a heroine in a real love-affair, then, this beautiful sister of hers; she would be pressed to accept an unwelcome lover, just as in so many of the novels Hennie and herself had been delighting in of late. Would Margot yield, or remain obstinate? Either way it would be very interesting, Ida thought; she was sure this planter's son was nice really, if Margot would only see it—very likely they had had a quarrel.

Margot was looking forward to meeting her mother with a certain excitement. Evidently this project of uniting her to young Chadwick was not abandoned. Allen himself apparently regarded it as settled. Margot was not afraid; she did not see what new arguments her mother could urge that could shake her determination. There might be cases in which a daughter was bound to sacrifice herself for the family, but this was not one of them; even if it was, she thought, she would have enough strength of mind to repudiate the obligation. No, she felt perfectly safe; no one could force her to marry against her will.

And yet, when she was alone that night and lay in her room,

listening to the monotonous roll of the sea, a sudden, restless dread overcame her as she thought of the steamer which was even then ploughing its way across the waves ; what if it were carrying some sentence which, with all her courage, she would find herself powerless to resist ? She rose at last, from some half-superstitious impulse, and went to the window. The amber harvest moon was casting its shimmer on the calm sea and bathing the little harbour and jetty in mellow radiance, but beyond, where the French coast lay, a black cloud loomed up ominously, and seemed to be shooting a long arm across the sky towards her. With a little laugh at her own weakness, Margot drew the blind, and shut out the sight.

BOOK II.

KICKING AGAINST THE PRICKS.

CHAPTER I.

SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS.

Thou sweetest sister in the world, hast never a word for me?
The Lay of the Brown Rosary.

MISS CHEVENING had risen betimes next morning and gone down to the quay. It was cold and cloudy, and there was a light autumn fog on the sea, but Margot was sustained against all atmospheric influences just then; she was about to know on what grounds her mother conceived that she could exact her submission. The spirit of opposition was roused; she felt strong enough to meet all appeals with an unflinching negative. And as she passed the quaint old whitewashed hotel, which at that time still stood on an isolated piece of the green, someone, who seemed to have been waiting for this, came out from the porch, and advanced, sheepishly enough, to meet her. Margot watched him with a sardonic amusement; that clumsy bow and self-conscious flush of his pleased her mood just then—*this* was the person her mother considered a suitable companion for her for life.

‘I—I thought you’d be likely to come this way,’ he said. ‘I hope you’ve been pretty well since I saw you last . . . Margot?’ He brought out her Christian name with an evident effort, which by its very abjectness disarmed her to some extent; he seemed too pitiable just then in his humble anxiety to propitiate her.

‘I am quite well, Mr. Chadwick,’ she said. ‘I hardly expected to see you so soon—are you staying here?’

‘Came over yesterday with the governor,’ he explained. ‘I was trying to get a sight of you all day, but I didn’t like to give you a look up at your lodgings.’

‘That would have been rather an odd thing to do, would it not?’ said Margot.

‘I wanted to tell you something,’ he resumed nervously. ‘I—I dare say you’ll laugh, but I haven’t been able to get out of my mind that perhaps that night before you went away, at the Casino, you fancied——’

'Oh, please!' protested Margot, 'don't let us go back to Trouville! I have forgotten it. I want to forget all that hateful time.'

'No, but listen,' he said. 'I'm going down to meet the boat—we may as well go together.' And he poured into her unwilling ears a rapid vindication of his behaviour at the Petits Chevaux table.

'Very well,' said Margot, as he finished; 'but you need not have given yourself so much trouble to tell me all this, Mr. Chadwick. I don't see that it is of very much importance now, you know.'

'More than ever, now,' he said.

Margot felt driven to bay. 'You seem to me to mean something? You meant something yesterday—if it was really you who spoke to my little sister. Will you kindly explain? Did you, or didn't you, inform her that you meant to—to become her brother very soon?'

'If I did,' said Allen, 'it was nothing but true—surely you've been told all about it?'

'My consent to such a very desirable arrangement was naturally taken for granted!' retorted Margot bitterly; 'still, Mr. Chadwick, you might have paid me the compliment of waiting.'

'I!' exclaimed Allen. 'It was none of my doing.'

'You are extremely candid,' said Miss Chevening, with a slight laugh, 'I will be candid, too. If anyone has persuaded you to believe that I——'

'Stop!' cried Allen, with more delicacy than might have been expected from him, perhaps. 'I see what you're thinking. I know well enough you could never come to look on me in that sort of way—such a thing never entered my head, indeed it didn't, miss—Miss Margot. I know myself better than that. No, it wasn't *that* I meant.'

'I'm afraid I'm very dull,' said Margot, beginning to wish that she could recall that unfortunate speech; 'but what did you mean, then? Because I don't see——'

'Isn't there another way for us all to live together, and me be a kind of brother to your sisters, and—and to you?' he said. 'Your mother——'

Margot stood quite still; her face was deadly white, her eyes blazed with anger. In a flash her mind went back to those days at Trouville, to her mother's marked encouragement of the ex-indigo planter, their constant companionship, the strange anxiety to prevent her from betraying her dislike to the son. In her egotism, she had never suspected that she herself was the least concerned, she had let herself be removed where she could offer no opposition—and now it was too late! Her head whirled in the rush of fierce anger, impotent protest against this humiliation which her own mother had brought upon them!

'I thought you knew!' stammered Allen. 'It was the day after you left; father told me almost directly. Look here, if you don't

believe me, come down to the Custom-House—father's there waiting; *he'll* tell you it's all true!

'Don't speak to me!' said Margot, closing her eyes for a moment, 'and—and go on to the quay alone, please; you can say, if—if you are asked, that I am not well enough to come—don't talk, go—go!'

She walked back to the little lodging-house parlour and stood in the bow-window looking out over the green, mechanically watching a groom who was exercising a horse there—she felt as if she were going mad.

How long she stood there, with a horrible feeling that her face was a mask with nothing but an aching emptiness behind, she did not know, but presently the children came down to breakfast. 'Hasn't mother come? *Why* hasn't mother come? Did you go down to see if she was on the steamer? *Why* didn't you go down?' were amongst the questions she had to endure from Reggie and Lettice, until the prawns served as a merciful distraction.

'How pale you look, darling!' said Ida, the moment she appeared, 'and—and hasn't mother come? Is anything wrong?'

'Yes—no,' said Margot impatiently. 'Mother is quite well, I believe; she will be here directly no doubt.' She shivered as she spoke at the thought of the arrival.

Miss Henderson cast an amused glance at Ida; evidently Margot's heroics were beginning to evaporate. Margot saw the glance—how little they all guessed what was before them! and who was to prepare them? *She* could not, and she sat there in mute misery, with a nervous glance at the road whenever the sound of fly-wheels approached.

And, after many false alarms, the dreaded moment came; one of those four-wheeled *struld-brugs* which are only to be seen at watering-places, drove up, piled with luggage, and in it, looking rather the worse for the passage, but smiling perseveringly, sat Mrs. Chevening.

The children ran out to welcome her, and Ida and Miss Henderson were on the steps. Margot alone remained within, and listened with a shuddering disgust to the kisses and greetings in the passage outside. How could her mother behave as if nothing was changed, as if she had not deliberately bartered away their old peaceful independent life! But Allen might have been mistaken. The first moment that her mother's eyes met hers, she knew it was all too true—there was a look at once deprecatory and defiant that told her all.

'Well, Margot dearest, how are you?' said Mrs. Chevening, in a higher key than ordinary. 'Not repented deserting Trouville in that absurd manner, I hope?'

Margot shrank a little from her embraces. 'Not till to-day,' she said in a low voice.

'Why, you really don't look yourself!' cried Mrs. Chevening. 'When dear Allen told me you were not well enough to be on the

quay, I thought that a lazy fit perhaps—but just come up to my room presently, darling, and we two will have a cosy little chat all to ourselves!’

A little later, when Mrs. Chevening had changed her travelling costume and regained her ordinary appearance, Margot entered the room.

‘You have something to tell me, mother?’ she said.

Mrs. Chevening looked at the proud pale face, with the beautiful mouth arched in a slight curve of irrepressible contempt, and felt slightly uncomfortable. ‘Just see if you can find my hand-glass first, dearest one,’ she said; ‘those Custom-House wretches do make such havoc in one’s dressing-bag. It really is as Joshua said to them——’

‘Is “Joshua” Mr. Chadwick?’ asked Margot. ‘It is true, I suppose—you are going to—to marry him?’

‘What a tragic voice!’ exclaimed Mrs. Chevening; ‘one would think he was an ogre. There are not many men, let me tell you, in his position who would have acted as generously as he has done; he looks upon you all as his own children already; he is ready to provide you with all those advantages which only wealth can afford, which otherwise I should have to see you deprived of for ever.’

‘Do you think I should have missed them?’ cried Margot.

‘That bears out what I always say of you, dearest; you are just a trifle too self-absorbed. I was thinking less of you than of the others. You forget that in—in our happier days, you *had* all these advantages; no expense was spared to give you all the education and accomplishments a girl ought to have on entering the world. Even after my terrible loss I contrived (you will never know with what efforts) to keep you at Brighton for the full course. It doesn’t—it really does *not*—become you now to stand in the way of the younger ones, especially when, as you might know if you cared to, I can hardly tell which way to turn for enough money to keep them decently fed and dressed.’

‘Mother,’ cried Margot, ‘we had always enough, and I would have worked, I would have done anything—*anything* to prevent this!’

‘I really don’t know in what way you could have earned more than enough to keep yourself, and perhaps you are not aware that my bills are nothing like all paid.’

‘Then why are we here? Why did we go to an expensive place like Trouville?’

‘I went chiefly for your sake, my dear; but I see no reason to repent it, nor, I should think, will those wretched tradesmen who have been worrying my life out so long.’

‘You might,’ said Margot in a low voice—‘you might have remembered papa—it is such a few years since he——’

‘You think I have forgotten? How little you know your mother, Margot, if you can say such cruel things! But his constant anxiety was that he was able to save so little for you children,

and if he were permitted to advise me now, he would understand and approve—yes, though my eldest daughter presumes to judge and condemn!’ and Mrs. Chevening applied a corner of her handkerchief delicately to the corner of each eye.

‘Tell me just this,’ said Margot; ‘do you—oh, it’s horrible to say—do you *love* this Mr. Chadwick? Shall you be proud of him? Oh, you cannot, you cannot!’

‘I deny your right to put such questions to me,’ said Mrs. Chevening. ‘I shall do my duty. At our age it would be absurd to pretend to sentiment. If you choose to say so, I am marrying for convenience—but at least it is the convenience of those who are dear to me, and when they turn against me, and speak like strangers, and as if they had nothing but contempt for their poor mother any more—ah, my dear, I trust no daughter of *yours* will ever cut you to the heart as you are cutting me now! How hard—how *wickedly* hard you are to me, Margot!’

‘I don’t mean to be—I won’t be!’ she cried, throwing her beautiful strong arms round her mother; ‘only give this up—let us be as we were together in our dear old shabby house, with no one to come between us, mother darling! It isn’t too late—it will be better in the end. Send Mr. Chadwick away again!’

Mrs. Chevening disengaged herself angrily. ‘You are talking like an idiot!’ she said. ‘I shall certainly keep a promise I consider sacred; so let me hear no more of this.’

‘Then,’ said Margot wildly, ‘let *me* go away! I cannot live in the same house with them. I could not breathe there—let me go!’

‘By all means go,’ returned her mother, ‘if you wish to make us out monsters in the eyes of the world. Only, as I said before, I am at a loss to see what you propose to do. I don’t think your aunt Gwendolen will receive you very warmly; she will probably call you a foolish girl for running away from a comfortable home and one who only desires to be an indulgent father to you. And I doubt whether you would be more independent as a governess, even if you were fit to undertake a situation. One thing you will understand, that if you choose to do anything so headstrong, you will cut yourself off from all of us, and I should have thought you had some affection for your sisters and Reggie at least, if you have none for me! I certainly could not expect or wish Mr. Chadwick to receive you at our new home, after you had shown everybody that you thought yourself too good to associate with him. If you separate from us now, you do so for ever!’

Margot drew a long, sobbing breath; she realised the cruel force of her mother’s words. All the tenderer side of her nature was expended upon her younger sisters and brother; she was passionately devoted to them, and yet, if she were to carry out her impulsive resolve, and refuse to countenance her mother’s act of disloyalty to the dead, there was nothing before her but a life of solitude and slavery. She would be shut out from all she loved, condemned to the employment most uncongenial and unfitted to

her nature—teaching. She saw no other resource; she knew too well that, untrained as she was, she could not hope to gain a footing on the stage or the concert-platform, and she shrank from the mere idea of serving in a shop. She felt herself, in the full course of her indignation and passionate protest, brought up short and hemmed in by impenetrable realities against which she was powerless, rebel as she might.

She had not broken down till then, but now, as much with anger as grief, she burst into a passion of tears. 'I can't leave them!' she sobbed. 'Mother, you know it would kill me—oh, what shall I do!'

Mrs. Chevening saw that the battle was almost won. 'Do?' she said. 'Do what any sensible girl would do in your place. Give up raging and sulking at a state of things that you can't possibly prevent. Of course you can make your stepfather and me very uncomfortable if you choose. But please be consistent—submit cheerfully, and I really cannot see that you will have any hardships to bear. Or, if you can't do that, carry out your protest and go!'

'Would you be glad for me to go?' demanded Margot.

'You goose, of course not! I want to be proud of my eldest daughter, and see her in surroundings worthy of her, for I needn't tell you, my dear, that you have your share of beauty, though it is completely thrown away in the sort of life we have had to live till now. But I can't have you spoiling everything by posing as a martyr, and refusing to recognise my husband at the very time you are living under his roof and eating his bread. You must see yourself how impossible a state of things that would be!'

'It is not Mr. Chadwick so much,' said Margot; 'it is his son—will *he* be there?'

'Of course he will be there! Do you suppose his father would turn the poor boy out to gratify your convenience? What harm can poor Allen possibly do you? He is ready to be a devoted son to me and the fondest of brothers to you all. I was quite touched by his real delight when he was told—any other young man in his position would have felt injured, jealous perhaps. And a few sisterly hints, a little patience and tact on your part, Margot, and he would soon grow out of any slight mannerisms he has picked up. I am sure he has an excellent disposition, and will not be difficult to manage. Now pray let me see you looking brave and cheerful, and not acting as a wet blanket any more. Promise me to be sensible.'

'I promise that I won't show what I can't help feeling, just at first, any more than I can help. I can't pretend to be glad, or to be fond of Mr. Chadwick all at once. You won't ask too much?'

'I will be satisfied with that—for the present,' said Mrs. Chevening; 'now kiss me, darling, and go to your room till you are a little more composed.'

So Margot found herself driven to surrender ignominiously. Alone in her room once more, as she thought of the gallant, hand-

some soldier who had been so proud of her, and had liked to have her with him wherever it was possible in those last few months before he went out to meet his death in Afghanistan, her tears rose afresh. Her mother might forget—but she, never! For the new head of the house she had no respect, no affection, but she would keep her compact with her mother as far as outward show went. But there was Allen—and at the thought of him she set her teeth and clenched her soft hands in angry revolt.

There would be no escape from him now—never! He would live in the same house, he would have the right of treating her as his equal, of speaking of her, and to her, as his sister. Even while he was nothing to her but an accidental acquaintance, she had conceived an antipathy to him which she felt herself was exaggerated—but now that antipathy had turned to hatred—yes, she hated him, though till then she had held him beneath the dignity of hatred; she hated him for what she well knew he had no more part in bringing about than herself.

And—bitterest and most unpalatable of all—this hatred which possessed her must be confined to her own breast; only in secret could she dare to give herself the luxury of expression. From its object it must be rigorously hidden.

There may be some, perhaps, to whom Allen Chadwick will seem scarcely less to be pitied. Mere unrequited affection is too ordinary a woe to excite much compassion; it is only when humble unselfish devotion on one side is met with deep-seated invincible aversion on the other that the situation has something of a tragic side to it.

CHAPTER II.

LELF AND CHINA.

The little hearts that know not how to forgive!—*Maud*.

MARGOT's passionate resentment had worn itself out for the time being, and she grew tired of being miserable alone. There were the others, too, who were probably still in ignorance of what was impending; a sense of loyalty to them made her wish to prepare them. As she expected, she found them with Miss Henderson in a small sitting-room at the back, which was generally reserved for lessons on wet days; even before she opened the door sounds of subdued wailing within told her that she was too late—they knew all. It was a doleful little gathering enough: Ida, with red eyes and a look of tragic despair, was holding tightly to the governess's hand, which she caressed from time to time as they sat on the shiny little sofa. Miss Henderson had assumed an air of martyred resignation suitable to the occasion, though she was inwardly deeply perplexed as to the effect these changes were to have upon her

future. If only she could retain her post, things might not be so bad after all; in the meantime a really interesting woe like the present was too great a luxury not to be indulged in to the full; and both Ida and she (although perhaps they did not know it) had derived considerable enjoyment from it already. Their tears broke out afresh on Margot's entrance; Ida and Lettice threw themselves sobbing into her arms; Reggie went to the window, which commanded a not too lively prospect of cistern, back-garden, and slate-roofed stables, and stood there whistling in a dismal quaver. Miss Henderson wept in a discreet manner on the sofa, behind a handkerchief with a highly ornamental border.

'Isn't it too awful!' cried Ida indistinctly. 'I call it simply horrid of mother to do this. Behind all our backs too! Margot, you were there—you must have known—why didn't you stop it? you might at least have prepared us!'

'How could I?' said Margot. 'Do you think if I had known—but I was kept in the dark too.'

'It will kill me—I know it will!' moaned Ida; 'just as I was getting well, too! How *can* mother? What miserable girls we are!'

'It's as bad for me as you, every bit,' broke in Reggie, with a suspicious sniff, 'only I d-don't b-blub about it!'

'Margot, shall we all have to be somebody else, too, if mother is?' asked Lettice; 'or what? Will nothing ever be the same any more?'

'Of course it won't!' said Ida, disconsolately. 'We shall be nobodies, now—the first thing will be that poor dear Hennie will be sent away, and we shall have to get on anyhow. I dare say we shall be turned out, too, some day—he'll be sure to hate us all! And there's a step-brother, a young man—he'll never rest till he's per—persecuted us out of the house! I know what it will be. Margot and I will have to hem shirts (and I *hate* sewing) and Reggie will sell papers, and Lettice mum—mum—matches, and we shall all die of cold on doorsteps!'

At this affecting prophecy she went into fresh floods of tears, and threw herself inconsolable upon the sofa again, whereupon a general chorus of lamentation arose. Margot, however, did not join in it, feeling the scene, in fact, a parody upon her own reception of her mother's announcement; she could not see it in a humorous light just then, but it made her angry and a little ashamed.

'For goodness' sake, don't let us make idiots of ourselves any more!' she exclaimed. 'We shall be treated kindly enough, if that is all, I dare say. It is quite bad enough without trying to make it worse!'

'Is his name Chadwick?' demanded Ida. 'Wasn't that the name of the people you disliked so at the hotel?'

'Never mind what I told you once,' said Margot, 'and—and I never said that I disliked the father particularly.'

'It was the son, then, and you really *did* hate him? Hennie and I were not quite sure whether you meant it. What is he like? Do tell us!'

'You will see for yourself quite soon enough,' said Margot. 'He is a terrible person!'

'A terrible person!' cried Lettice. 'O Margot! and they are here—both of them. We saw their hats over the railings. Such horrid-looking hats!'

Steps were heard blundering up the stairs outside. Margot's face paled slightly. 'They're coming,' she whispered. 'Dry your eyes—quick, don't let them see we have been crying.'

A knock, violent from timidity, and Allen appeared—alone. 'It's only me,' he announced with an embarrassed appeal to Margot. 'Your mother said if I came up you'd introduce me, and—and make things comfortable all round.'

Margot was leaning lightly against the head of the sofa, which she was smoothing as delicately as if it were some favourite animal; she lifted her eyebrows at his remark with a careless disdain.

'Were those mother's exact words, I wonder?' she said; 'but I can't introduce you unless you will come out of that doorway.' ('He looks exactly as if he had come to wind the clock!' she was thinking.) 'That is better—do you mind shutting the door? Now we can get it done. This is our new brother. Mr. Allen Chadwick—Miss Henderson. This is my sister Ida, and this is Lettice, and that is Reggie.'

Allen made fumbling attempts to shake hands all round. 'I—you mustn't think I've any wish to intrude,' he said. 'It's rum at first, I know, but everything must have a beginning, eh? And as for Margot here, why I and she are quite old friends—though I'm sure when we first met I'd no more idea we should come to be such near relations—had you?'

'I!' said Margot. 'No, certainly *not*!'

'No more you hadn't,' he said. 'Why, do you remember this morning how taken aback you were when I told you?'

'Do I remember?' repeated Margot. 'Why yes, I have some faint recollection of it.'

'Mine isn't faint,' he said without detecting the irony in her tone. 'You wouldn't believe it at any price—the same with me at first. It seemed too good to be true. To think of me feeling lonely all these years for want of someone my own age to be company, and all the time a family growing up ready for me, if only I'd known it! It's funny when you come to look at it.'

'We haven't arrived at seeing the funny side of it yet,' observed Margot calmly. 'It is strange enough, certainly.'

'That's what I meant,' he explained; 'but I'm sure I've no call to quarrel with present arrangements. I'm as pleased as Punch, if you don't consider it a liberty of me to say so.'

He was more voluble than usual, in spite of his nervousness, for he could not repress the pride and satisfaction it gave him to

be able to claim kinship with them, though he was awed at the same time by a sense of their immense superiority to himself. The younger Chevenings were remarkably good-looking, with the same air of race and distinction that gave such character to their elder sister's beauty. Between them and the undersized, insignificant-looking Allen a gulf of difference was fixed, which he could not fail to perceive. Some natures would have felt this superiority only to hate its possessors with a rankling envy, but there was no trace of this in Allen's sentiments towards the Chevenings. He felt an almost awe-struck admiration for them already. Margot he had worshipped from the first in reverent humility, all unconscious, poor fellow, of the intensity of her repugnance to him. And now that he had seen the others—Ida, with her delicate face and clinging grace, Reggie, whose eyes had a look in them of Margot's, and Lettice, whose dainty childish loveliness was a new experience to him, he was willing to extend his allegiance in a scarcely less degree, anxious to convince them of the sincerity of his good will—so far as his somewhat restricted vocabulary would permit.

Unfortunately his past had left him with a manner, which, when it was not uncouth, was instinctively obsequious in the presence of those in what he had been taught to regard as a higher station than his own.

Theoretically they were his equals now, but it cost him an effort to remember and act upon the knowledge, and, when he did, the only result was a familiarity which hardly rendered him more engaging.

On the other side, the first impressions were very far from favourable. Miss Henderson made up her mind privately at the first sight of him that it would not only be necessary, but desirable, to look out for another situation, and gave a side-glance of pity at Ida, who needed it at that moment. Ida's romantic imaginings of a dark, black-browed step-brother, who would be forbidding, but interesting in appearance, and would hate them all relentlessly—until he was disarmed by her own sweetness—were dispersed by the reality—but she was none the happier for that. On the contrary, the knowledge that the fate in store for them was of so commonplace, not to say vulgar, a kind was the bitterest drop in her cup. Reggie stood and stared, with his hands thrust deep in his pocket; how such a fellow as this could be by any possibility about to become their brother was more than he could understand. Why—he looked like a sort of shop-boy, only a little better dressed.

Lettice was the only one who seemed more reassured than dismayed. Allen's announcement to her the day before had not left any deep impression, and in the general disturbance of all her ideas she had not had time to connect the unknown step-brother with the person whose acquaintance she had made already—now that she recognised him, her worst fears fled.

‘I didn't know the new brother was going to turn out to be *you*

after all,' she remarked. 'You weren't in fun yesterday, then? *I* don't think you're a terrible person at all. Are you?'

'Not that I'm aware of,' said Allen. 'First time *I* ever heard of it, if I am.'

'I didn't think so,' pursued Lettice, 'because, when I hit you by accident with Yarrow's ball, you turned so very red and looked frightened—didn't you?'

'I—I can't say,' said Allen, in some confusion. 'I couldn't see myself, you know.'

'Look in the glass now—you're just the same. If you're afraid of us,' suggested Lettice, 'hadn't you better be somebody else's brother, instead of ours? Because, really and truly, we've only just enough room for ourselves at home. It wouldn't be at all comfortable for you.'

'Don't you trouble about me,' said Allen; 'I shall be right enough. And you won't live where you are much longer. There'll be lots of room.'

'He is only teasing you, dear,' said Margot, noticing the alarm returning to Lettice's eyes. 'Don't believe a word he says.'

'Why,' he protested, 'it's all true. I'm not joking, you *will* turn out of where you are!'

Lettice's mouth was quivering: 'Then Ida was right!' she said. 'You *are* going to turn us out—when you know we've always lived at home with mother all our lives! Oh, it is unkind of you! Why should you want us to—to sell matches and starve? We never did anything to you, any of us!'

Allen understood at last. 'So that's what you've got in your head, is it?' he cried, with a noisy laugh. 'That's a good one and no mistake! Do you think anybody in their senses would want to turn the like of you out? Don't you be alarmed about that. I'll answer for it, father'll only be too glad to have you about—why, he'll think nothing too good for you; he won't make any differences, bless you, he's not that sort. What I meant by saying that you wouldn't live where you are long, was only that you'd soon be coming to live along with me and father—that's all!'

'But, if you don't mind,' said Lettice, 'I think we would rather stay where we are—we're so used to our own house, you see. Margot, wouldn't you rather be at home?'

'We have not been consulted, Lettice,' said her elder sister, with a bitter little smile. 'Everything has been settled without us. We must do as we are told!'

'I shan't, then,' interrupted Reggie. 'I shall just go on living where we are now. I'm sure his father won't have nearly such a nice house as ours is.'

'You wait till you see it!' said Allen. 'It's a splendid big house, with rooms you could put six of these into—regular first-class mansion, you know; glass-houses, with grapes and peaches growing, and conservatories, and a little stream running through

the grounds where you can fish if you like—I tell you, it's something like a place, ours is !'

Lettice and Reggie were both impressed by this picture. 'Would there be room for Yarrow there?' inquired Lettice.

'Room for a dozen Yarrows!' said Allen. 'My governor's rich, you know. Money's no consequence to him—why, since I've been with him, I've only to ask him for whatever it is I want—and so it'll be with you, so long as you behave yourselves, of course. You just see if you aren't a precious sight better off with us than what you would if you went on as you are!'

In reality, this speech, though not remarkable for tact, was dictated by the desire to reconcile them all, and Margot particularly, to the future, and was perfectly free from any mere impulse of ostentation. But on Miss Chevening's fastidious and prejudiced ear it jarred as the coarse expression of ignorant purse-pride. That this contemptible boor should dare to patronise them, to think that any riches, any material comfort could be a recompense for the humiliation of being related to him! She said nothing—of what use was it to speak now!—but her foot beat the floor in her nervous irritation, and her beautiful haughty face grew more contemptuous, if possible, than before.

'It would be nice to have a big garden,' said Lettice, 'and I like peaches too. But I don't think I should like living in somebody else's house always—it would be like being on a visit, and never going away. Shall you be there all the time?'

This question was put with an intonation that left little room for a flattering construction. 'I shan't be in your way,' said Allen, feeling almost bound to apologise for being there at all. 'And long before that you'll have got used to the governor and me—see if you haven't!'

'It takes me a long time to get used to people, always,' said Lettice gravely; '*years*, sometimes.'

'Well,' he conceded, 'take your own time—don't hurry yourself.'

Lettice's dignity was easily offended. 'As if I was going to!' she exclaimed. 'You *can't* hurry with things like that, and I'm not sure that I ever shall get quite used to you. You see, you'll only be a Pretence Brother, and I've got Reggie, who's a real one already!'

'Well,' said Allen, 'put up with me as well as you can, then, and I shan't complain.'

'If that will do,' said Lettice, 'I've begun to put up with you already, and of course you must put up with us too.'

He looked at her and the others with a rough admiration. 'That won't be much of a job,' he said, with the uncouth jocularly which was his only social equipment. 'I can do that on my head.'

A silence followed this short dialogue. Margot employed herself in studying a hideous glass disc containing an impossible view of Arundel Castle as if she had discovered in it a rare artistic merit.

Ida and the governess, ignoring Allen, carried on a conversation in low tones, Reggie returned to his window, and Lettice to the drawing which had been interrupted. Allen was left stranded in the centre of the carpet, equally unable to take his departure and start the conversation afresh; he had an idea that it would somehow betray ignorance of polite society to address any remark to a governess, and besides, he did not know what to say to her. He would have liked to talk to Margot about Trouville, but her manner was not encouraging just then, not even so encouraging as it used to be—he wondered why she had grown less cordial. He was just screwing up his courage to make an observation when there came the sweeping sound of a dress outside, and Mrs. Chevening, smiling and yet with a visible anxiety in her eyes, appeared.

‘So you have found your way up, dear Allen?’ she said to him. ‘And you all look quite at home together already. Children, I am bringing—Mr. Chadwick in to have a peep at you. Joshua, they are here—you can come up.’

Then a heavier footstep was heard ascending, and Chadwick entered.

‘Darlings,’ said their mother, ‘here is somebody who is very anxious to be kind and good to you all, and I know you all mean to be good children, and make him proud of you.’

They came forward, one by one, to be presented, Chadwick seeming sensible—as well he might—of a certain awkwardness in the situation

‘So these are the chicks?’ he said. ‘Come, we shan’t be dull at Agra House, whatever else we are! Well, my dears, I hope we’re going to be good friends. You’ve heard who I am by this time. Your mamma is kind enough to say she’s going to be my wife, and so you’re all coming to live comfortably with me, eh? Upon my word, Selina, they’re a credit to you—they are indeed. I don’t know when I’ve seen a finer looking lot—pick ‘em anywhere you like! Allen, old fellow, what do you think of your new brother and sisters, eh? Will they do?’

‘Yes—thank’ee, father,’ returned Allen, at a loss, as usual, for any more adequate words to express his feelings.

‘Dear boy,’ said Mrs. Chevening, ‘you must come as often as you like while we are here—they will be so delighted to have you with them, and Margot is quite an old friend of yours, you know.’

‘Ah, young lady, there you are, then?’ said Chadwick. ‘You kept so quiet, I didn’t notice you. Come, haven’t you a word for an old acquaintance? You’re not looking as well as you did at Trouville. I never made out exactly why you ran away and left us all there. A pretty fright I had when I found you and your mother both gone, and left not so much as a card to say good-bye. Anxious about your sister, were you? That’s right enough—not that there’s much of the invalid about her now. Well, you didn’t expect to see us turning up like this, I dare say?’

Margot forced herself to put her fingers in his hand and submit

to his boisterous rallying. She wondered whether her mother winced under it, as she did, but no—Mrs. Chevening was smiling complacently, having apparently made up her mind to see no shortcomings in her future husband.

Chadwick, more to keep himself in countenance than with any more definite object, had been wandering round the table, where he came upon a sheet of paper covered with pencil drawings of a primitive order of art.

‘What have we got here?’ he said. ‘Who’s the artist?’

‘Lettice, I suspect,’ said her mother.

‘Is it you, missie? Come here and tell us what it’s all about.’

‘I—I don’t like to quite,’ said Lettice shyly, who had a habit of solacing herself in calamity by inventing pictures appropriate to the particular situation.

‘Don’t be silly, darling,’ said Mrs. Chevening. ‘Do what you are asked to do—at once!’

‘It’s only a story,’ explained Lettice at last. ‘Those are the pictures for it—only you’re holding them upside down.’

‘Oh, this way up, with care, eh? Well, who’s this in a straw hat jumping with an umbrella in her hand—Mrs. Jim Crow?’

‘It isn’t a straw hat,’ said Lettice, forgetting everything else in the reflection on her powers of portrayal, ‘it’s a halo—she’s a kind of saint, you know, like those in the Old Masters, and it isn’t an umbrella in her hand exactly, but something of the same kind. She’s protecting a poor little girl (that’s the little girl in the corner) because her mamma married again, and so she was turned out of the house.’

‘Lettice, you mustn’t tease Mr. Chadwick!’ interrupted her mother hastily. ‘Children have such absurd fancies, Joshua, but they don’t mean anything by them.’

‘Let’s have this out,’ said Chadwick, roughly but not unkindly. ‘So you’ve been thinking that little girls whose mammas marry again always get turned out as a regular thing, eh? You won’t want that saint yet awhile—tell her to wait till you’re a naughty little girl and deserve turning out. Then she can bring on her umbrella!’

‘I’m sure to be naughty *some* day,’ said Lettice, whom experience had made fatalistic in this respect; ‘a *little* naughty, you know.’

‘Well, you’ll have to be very naughty indeed before you’re turned out, and then I shall think twice about it. I’ve been turned out myself once, and I know what it’s like!’

He patted her head as he spoke, and Lettice, though she winced a little under his heavy hand, felt that she need not think seriously about dying on a doorstep just yet.

‘Well,’ said Chadwick, who could not be accused of excess of sentiment, ‘they’ll be doing that beefsteak to a cinder, Allen, my boy, if we are not back at the hotel soon! Good-bye, my darl—h’m—my dears! See you again soon!’

When the girls were alone again, there was a cautious silence, broken by Margot :

‘Did I exaggerate much?’ she demanded. ‘Isn’t our future brother a fascinating person? How proud we shall be to be seen with him!’

‘Margot,’ asked Lettice, ‘would you call him a gentleman?’

‘If I called him a Greek god, dear,’ said Margot, ‘that wouldn’t make him one. Why?’

‘I was only thinking,’ said Lettice, whose thoughts were apt to take an involved form, ‘there are some gentlemen who *are* gentlemen who *aren’t* gentlemen—and there are other gentlemen who *aren’t* gentlemen who *are* gentlemen—which should you say he was, Margot?’

‘I’m not clever enough to tell you, darling—and now you and Reggie must go and get ready for dinner—off with you, quick!’

When they were gone, Ida said, with a tragic little groan, ‘It really is too awful, Margot! Hennie, don’t you pity us all?’

‘I do indeed, dearest—only, you know, I can’t very well say so!’

‘No, you poor darling! Oh, if only they will leave us you—you *will* try not to be sent away, Hennie, won’t you—you won’t desert us?’

Miss Henderson had been reconsidering her idea of seeking another engagement. These Chadwicks were clearly rich—she might even gain an increase in salary by remaining; she really was attached to Ida in her way, and her accomplishments were not so varied as to make it easy for her, in these days of competition, to find immediate employment without difficulty. She had decided, therefore, to use her best efforts to remain. Even if Mrs. Chevening, as was not unlikely, should be not unwilling to get rid of her, there were those arrears of salary which she might find it inconvenient to pay off all at once—and the governess had a shrewd suspicion that her employer would not disclose to her future husband more of her embarrassments than was absolutely necessary.

So she replied with much fervour that she would stand by her beloved Ida till cruel necessity forced her away; she hoped, she prayed, that when all her past services were remembered, no one would have the heart to send her adrift on the world—not even such people as the Chadwicks seemed to be.

‘Do you think mother really will marry that man?’ Ida asked Margot; ‘she *might* change her mind—even at the last moment. Can’t we do anything to show her how we hate it? He might give it up if he knew!’

‘Do you think I haven’t done all I could?’ cried Margot. ‘She says she is doing it for our sakes. For our sakes!’ she repeated, with a sense of the irony of the words. ‘But I am quite sure of this: she means to do it, and nothing in the world we can do or say will prevent her. We are quite helpless, you see. If we show *them* what we feel about it, we shall only look ridiculous. Why,’

she continued with deep indignation, 'mother even said just now that if I chose to oppose her openly, she would send me away—away from you all . . . She said she would have no other course.'

'Oh, Margot!' exclaimed Ida.

'You see what the danger is—we *must* put a good face on it. We needn't be hypocrites, of course, but if we're all to keep together, we must be prudent. We need only be civil to—to him, and if mother forces his horrid son upon us, well, we must bear it as well as we can. Fortunately,' added Margot, 'I think I taught him at Trouville not to expect too much.'

'How hateful he was, with his boasts about his father's money and house and all the rest of it!' exclaimed Ida.

'That is the sort of conversation we shall have to get used to,' said Margot; 'we shall be constantly reminded how much better off we are, and how thankful we ought to be. As if our dear old shabby house at Chiswick, where we knew only people we cared about, and did just as we pleased, was not all the home we ever wanted!'

'And yet we always used to be grumbling at it, didn't we?' said Ida, rendered ungrammatical by remorse. 'I know *I* was. Like the silly fir-tree in Hans Andersen, that never knew when it was well off. But must we really try to like that awful boy, Margot?'

'*Like* him—no!' said Miss Chevening. 'Who can like a thing like that? I detest him, and I always shall. But what is the use of showing it? You have to be very rude before you make any impression on that sort of person—I gave up the attempt long ago. We will take no more notice of him than we can possibly help, but I am afraid we shall have to take some.'

'After all,' said Miss Henderson, 'there are plenty of ways of keeping people at a distance without giving them any cause to complain.'

'That's how we will treat him!' cried Ida gleefully. 'You shall teach me, Hennie.'

And while these tactics were being discussed, the unconscious enemy was walking over the green in dazed delight at his own good fortune in being admitted into such a family, and thinking of the pleasure he would feel in introducing Margot to the glories of Agra House.

After all, it is not amiss to be dull of perception sometimes.

CHAPTER III.

TO DEAF EARS.

NOT much need be said of the time which was spent by the Chevenings and the two Chadwicks at Littlehampton. For Margot, they were days of acute humiliation;—she felt as if they were all being led captives at the chariot wheels of some Barbarian Conqueror. She could no longer, as at Trouville, look forward to approaching release; she was no longer free even to give full utterance to her thoughts; at things which had once moved her scorn she had now to blush as one directly concerned, and all her pride rebelled against the necessity which laid such a yoke as this upon her.

It was exaggerated feeling on her part, a prejudice she had wilfully fomented in her own mind—even Margot would have admitted that there was nothing in itself degrading or derogatory in an alliance with a wealthy ex-indigo-planter. It is true that Chadwick's early training, and the exceptionally unfriended life—thanks to his own choice and conduct—he had led in Bengal, had not tended to invest him with even the average amount of social polish. But, though coarse in grain and with a nature warped by a series of misfortunes, he was not, after all, aggressively vulgar in appearance; he was passable enough, and, so far, had shown every sign of being kindly disposed to those who were about to be dependent upon him. Still, Margot could not pardon her mother in her heart for descending to such a union as this. She would have found it difficult to reconcile herself to any second marriage her mother might make; but, in this case, her disapproval was aggravated by the intense, the unreasonably intense, dislike she had conceived for the innocent Allen. She was compelled, as far as possible, to abstain from expressing it openly, but in secret made no attempt to overcome it. On the contrary, she deliberately indulged it, storing up every jarring speech, every vulgar trick of voice and manner, as food to keep her resentment alive. She did not avoid his society at most times, and even humoured his halting efforts to entertain her, as if with a perverse determination to spare herself nothing.

Allen was again in the seventh heaven; she treated him once more as in those happy days at Trouville, listened while he talked to her, and made replies in which he at least failed to detect any covert irony. Then her sisters were with her now, and with them she would be sweet and natural, and gay sometimes, when she forgot, and he imagined, mistakenly enough, that he had some share in this intimacy, and was gladder at heart. Ah! if she would be really a sister to him, he told himself that he would ask no more, for was not that more than he had any claim to expect?—

though even then he knew very well that a feeling was growing up within him, which he was afraid to define to himself, and which he already had a foreboding would not end in happiness. Yet he did not strangle this hopeless passion of his when he might have done, but glozed it over with another name, as many a wiser and better educated person has done before him.

He did all in his power to propitiate the younger members of the family, but, except in the case of Reggie, his efforts were not as yet very successful, and Reggie's adherence was due to a discovery that this queer new brother had plenty of pocket-money, and could be induced to spend it on sweetstuff for his benefit by a few judicious hints. He had it all to himself, too, for Lettice declined to accept any, even from her brother. Her rejection of all Allen's advances gave him a sore heart now and then, for he felt strongly drawn to Lettice, with her quaint dignity and frank, fearless ways; he would willingly have been friends with her, if she had consented. But Lettice's affections were not to be bought, and the example set her by her elders served to counteract any friendliness she might otherwise have extended to him.

For Ida Allen cared less; she took less pains to control her tongue; he did arrive sometimes at suspecting her of deliberately intending to be disagreeable. She was affected, too, and querulous, and, pretty as she was, he felt less desire to conciliate her than any of the others; in fact, something very like the foundation of a grudge against her was laid in him during those last few days at Littlehampton.

The time was spent mostly in expeditions to various local places of interest; to Arundel, and Chichester, and Worthing, and others; expeditions of which Chadwick, as at Trouville, assumed the entire command. He had not seen them since he was a boy, he declared, and he insisted that they should all see them together, though Margot, at least, chafed at going sightseeing in this *bourgeois* fashion. It had seemed wearisome enough in Normandy, but now she was directly involved and could no longer maintain her attitude of unconcerned superiority.

To a high-spirited, intensely proud girl as she was, exclusive and fastidious by nature, and regarding the commonplace with youthful intolerance, her position was genuinely trying, though not so hard, it must be owned, as she chose to consider it. She was miserable; she had often felt before that she was deprived of opportunities which other girls enjoyed, which she, too, had once confidently looked forward to; but, if existence in the unfashionable old house by the river, with few friends and little gaiety, had been dull, it was never ignoble—there was a dignity in it, in spite of their limited means and money troubles (of which she had preferred to remain in contented ignorance), which had comforted her at her lowest. Now that was all over; there could be no poetry henceforth for her in this new atmosphere of vulgar well-being. Condemned to be constantly with those who were utterly

out of sympathy with her, she felt for ever shut out from congenial society—for she could not imagine that any ‘nice’ people would care to visit at her step-father’s. Had he not enlarged sometimes on the unfriendliness of his county neighbours? She did not wonder at it, and of course they would be under the ban too.

Mrs. Chevening’s equanimity did not seem to be disturbed by any doubts as to the wisdom of the step she was taking. She had taken it rather sooner than she had intended, for the shock of her supposed departure from Trouville had brought Chadwick’s feelings to a climax; still she had long seen that, if she was to extricate herself from her growing difficulties, she must either marry her daughter well, or marry again herself. She had made careful inquiries into Chadwick’s position, and at one time she had allowed herself to speculate on the possibility of marrying Margot to his only son. But when Allen appeared on the scene, even Mrs. Chevening saw that this scheme must be abandoned. Margot proved impracticable, and her mother was clever enough to see that she was powerless here. His father, meanwhile, was showing unmistakable signs of desiring something more than friendship; he did not pretend to be in love, but he spoke more and more often of his big empty house, and the need he felt of a wife who would help him to gain a footing in the county. He was not alarmed by the fact of so many step-children—there was enough for all. Mrs. Chevening was tired of her fallen fortunes, of the constant and increasing battle between expenses and income; she wanted to see her brilliant Margot enjoying her rightful opportunities of marrying well; there were her other daughters to be considered, her son to be educated. As the wife of a wealthy ex-indigo-planter, she felt very certain of ensuring all these advantages; he was not over-refined, but she could school him where it was necessary, and keep him as much in the background as possible; the only social bar lay in what his father had been, and that could be got over now.

And so Mrs. Chevening soon persuaded herself that it was the only thing to do, and that, for her children’s sake, she ought to accept the offer, which was made in a peremptory ‘take it or leave it’ style that demanded an instant decision.

Accordingly, with some graceful phrases about giving her orphaned children a father, and supplying herself the place of a mother to ‘poor Allen,’ she had consented, with a private reflection that, should it turn out that she had been misinformed in any essential respects, she could always withdraw in time.

She had dreaded having to break the news to her family—above all to Margot, with whom she knew she must employ all her firmness before she could compel her to any sort of acquiescence. However, that was over, and really, as far as she could tell, the girls seemed wonderfully reconciled to it already, and by careful management, she kept their dislike to Allen from appearing

too plainly. 'They really seemed quite attached to dear Allen,' she would tell his father. 'He was a constant companion in all their walks. She was so pleased to see the shyness melting away, but of course Margot had given him a good character, and they felt as if they had known him ever so long; he seemed so happy to be with them, too—it was quite ideal altogether!'

Chadwick saw nothing, believed, and was well satisfied. He felt that he had done an uncommonly good stroke of business. He was going to marry a widow, who was still handsome and beyond question a lady. With her and her beautiful daughters to form the attraction at Agra House, he need not complain of isolation any longer, the county society would soon rally round him. And for Allen, too, the companionship of lively pretty girls would be a capital thing; it would teach him certain things which his father was beginning dimly to see he needed to be taught. Yes, his first marriage had been a mistake, he saw that now, and he had had to pay for it with over twenty years' exile and hardship—his second marriage was going to be a success.

Such, so far, were the various attitudes of the persons interested. It should be mentioned here that one humble member of the Chevening family extended to Allen a friendship which had nothing in it of reserve or self-interest, and that was the dog Yarrow. For some inscrutable reason, the collie received him at once into unhesitating favour, beaming on him with liquid golden-tawny eyes, presenting him handsomely with his honest paw and pushing his panting head under Allen's arm at every possible opportunity. For this he was lectured in private by Lettice, who considered it almost in the light of a desertion to the enemy; and even Margot, to whom he nominally belonged, was not above feeling a secret chagrin—although she did not deign openly to notice this exhibition of bad taste on Yarrow's part.

Allen did not know much about dogs, and had never owned one in his life, but he was grateful to the collie for his preference—it seemed to him a good omen that Margot's dog should be fond of him.

When this constant companionship with the Chevening girls came to an end, as it did in a very few days on their departure for London, he felt almost as bereaved as on that miserable afternoon at Trouville when he learned that Margot had gone. But things were not nearly so bad now; he would see them still occasionally at Chiswick during the winter, and early in the year they were all coming to live at Agra House (so christened by his grandfather, in defiant commemoration of the business which had enriched him)—that was something to be patient for. The weeks that followed were rather dull for him; his father was absent in town for the greater part of the time, and Allen lived at his new home with no other companion than the grim relative who had brought him up, and whom Chadwick had established there as temporary caretaker. Allen naturally had no experience of shooting or hunting; the man who looked after the stables gave him a few riding lessons

now and then, but Allen showed no particular aptitude for horsemanship, and the groom was rather ashamed of going out with him. 'He do sit loose, that young chap—as loose as anyone I ever see on top of a horse,' he would remark in the village. 'Now the gov'nor, any one 'ud tell *he's* been in the saddle a bit, not that I call *him* a rider—but that young Allen, blest if I think he knows a horse 'as a mouth at all!'

He was not more successful at shooting; he knew none of the residents, and the Agra House grounds had no cover to speak of, so the sport was confined to missing an occasional rabbit. And his aunt, though she treated him with an increase of respect, as became his altered fortunes, was not cheerful society, especially when she approached the subject of her brother-in-law's second marriage.

'What he wants to marry *for* at his age, I don't know!' she would often remark, as they sat in the big dining-room, with the 'handsome' furniture, dull-toned paper, and immense gaselier, which the late Mr. Chadwick had insisted upon. 'I'd have looked after everything for him, if that was all. But no—he's not content with that, he must be marrying the first woman who chooses to set her cap at him—a widow, they tell me. Any family, has she got?' she inquired once.

'Four,' Allen answered, with a secret thrill; 'one grown-up—a young lady, you know.'

'Ah! a worldly widow with a family,' his aunt commented. 'Well, I don't know what your poor mother would have said to it, I'm sure, if she could see such doings. But there, it's no use my saying anything—though I'm sorry for you, that I am!'

'You needn't be, aunt,' was Allen's ordinary reply to this. 'I'm glad.'

'Glad, are you? Then, Allen Chadwick, you're a bigger fool than I took you for—but there, you'll find your mistake out some day!'

And Miss Wrigley would go on with her knitting with a highly expressive snort. In her narrow way she had done her duty by her nephew, and though he had not been as steady as she wished him to be, and was not as bright and smart as some of her neighbours' lads, she had a certain grim affection for him, which showed itself in a touch of sharpness sometimes at his apparent inability to take his own part and look after his interests.

'He's like his mother in that,' she would think. 'She'd have let anyone cut the head off her shoulders if they asked her!'

While Allen was longing for the weeks to pass, and the day to come which would make him a member of Margot's family, she was grudging every hour that brought her nearer to the time. More than any of the others, she clung to the picturesque old-fashioned house by the river where they had spent the last few years. It was dingy and dark from the creepers that overgrew the front, and the scraggy truncated elms that almost brushed the great bow-window with their branches. The river, now leaden and mist-shrouded, glided by on the other side of the narrow road. At

night she heard the water lap and wash against the bank under her window, and wondered how she could ever have thought the sound a dismal one. Melancholy it might be, but, now that she had little cause to be joyous, the river seemed a soothing and unobtrusive sharer in her sorrow—she liked to fancy that it was a little sorry to lose them all.

And the house, so cool and fresh in summer, so snug and comfortable in winter, with such refinement and harmony in its faded tones and old furniture; the house, with its memories of happy, dreaming hours spent on summer afternoons in the balcony over the porch, of merry family romps, when her dignity as growing school-girl or 'finished' young lady was thrown to the winds; the very walls, associated with so many simple little festivals—how dear they had all become! She had never known till then how much it would cost her to leave all this, and they were to leave it for what? For a country house, built the day before yesterday by a retired tradesmen—for the elder Chadwick was nothing more; a poor exchange enough, even could they have been permitted to occupy it alone; but when she thought whose house it would be, and the position they would fill in it, her heart swelled with indignation against her mother.

When Lady Yaverland heard of the step her younger sister was contemplating, she did what she had not found time to do for some years—she drove down to Chiswick in state from Portman Square, and it being impossible to drive up to the house, from the fact that the road along the bank was a mere footpath at that particular spot, her carriage was to be seen waiting in a back road, the nearest point of approach, with the coachman wearing an expression which seemed to disown all personal responsibility for being found in such a neighbourhood, while a fur-caped footman stood majestically by the railings in front of the shabby old ivy-grown house. Lady Yaverland had brought her youngest daughter, Valeria, with her, and, at a suggestion from her mother, Margot took her cousin off to her own room. The two girls had never been intimate; the Honourable Miss Valeria Brading, who, if patrician, was undeniably plain in appearance, was inclined to resent her cousin's beauty, and patronised her when they met in a highly provoking manner. 'Do tell me all about it,' she began, as she sank down in Margot's easy-chair. 'I am so interested. When is Aunt Selina going to marry? Aren't you awfully delighted?'

'Mother is going to marry early next year, Valeria,' said Margot. 'And I'm *not* awfully delighted. I think it's dreadful!'

'You *very* curious person!' said Miss Brading languidly. 'Why, I should have thought it was the best thing that could happen for all of you. Won't you be fearfully well off now. I thought he was so rich and all that?'

'What are his riches to us?' said Margot. 'Do you think one can't be happy without that?'

'I should certainly have thought,' said Miss Valeria, with glance

round the room, in the appointments of which taste was more conspicuous than luxury, 'that you would like to see more of the world than you can possibly do in a place like this. I dare say you will live in town for the season now, and go out, and all that sort of thing. You'll enjoy it, because it will all be fresh to you. It isn't as if you had grown up in it as I have!'

'I don't know where we shall live—in the country, most likely, all the year,' said Margot, 'but I know I shall not enjoy anything, wherever we are. I should hate myself if I thought I could!'

'That's so silly, dear,' remarked her cousin, in a superior tone, which was undeniably infuriating. 'We think it quite a nice arrangement in every way.'

'Very likely,' said Miss Chevening warmly. 'It must be pleasanter to have rich relations than poor ones, however little you see of them. Never mind, Valeria, we will agree that we ought to consider ourselves very fortunate—only we are so stupid that we don't. And now let's talk of something else.'

'Indeed, I've no wish to pursue the subject, only I must say that, if you will bury yourselves away in a place like this, it is rather too much to complain of people not coming to see you—it is really.'

'Is it, Valeria?' said Margot. 'If I did complain, I won't do it again. Come into the schoolroom and see Ida and Lettice, they'll be so glad.'

Lady Yaverland took her leave in a most cordial manner. 'Good-bye, Selina, dearest,' she said, as she rose; 'we shall hope to see more of you in the future. I really am more enchanted than I can say. Now do bring Mr. Chadwick to see me some day—let me see, shall it be next Wednesday?—No, I've got something on Wednesday, I *know*. Thursday, then? or stop, there are people coming to lunch on Thursday, we shan't get a moment together. Valeria, are we free on Friday, darling? Oh, that tiresome afternoon concert at the Brutons! Well, I must write and fix a day, and, in any case, you will be sure to let me know when and where the ceremony is to take place—I shall make a point of being there. Roberts, tell Jennings the carriage, please.'

So Lady Yaverland and her daughter walked back to their smart carriage, which was presently rolling away along the bankside, past the baring trees and decaying houses. Lady Yaverland was really pleased. She had married a wealthy manufacturer, who, for some services he had rendered his party, had been raised to the peerage as Baron Yaverland some years ago. After her husband had received this distinction, she had taken a position in society which did not allow her to see much of her sister, especially when Mrs. Chevening had become a widow, and was forced by her own imprudent speculations to withdraw beyond the radius recognised by Society and its coachmen.

She had felt some twinges of conscience, nevertheless, and was always on the point of seeing whether something could not be done for 'poor dear Selina,' consoling herself for doing nothing by the

reflection that living must be very cheap at Chiswick, and if Selina was really in any difficulties she would write and ask for assistance. Now that Selina was actually going to make a really sensible marriage, Lady Yaverland's heart naturally warmed to her; she could be cordial now with impunity—and hence her visit.

'*Dear Selina!*' she said to her daughter, as they drove away, 'she seems so contented and satisfied, spoke so nicely of him, I was quite pleased to hear her. She'll have everything she can want now, and those poor girls will be provided for after all. I must send her something really nice for a wedding present. You must help me to choose. Margot very delighted about it all, I suppose?'

'I shouldn't say she was enthusiastic exactly,' drawled Miss Valeria. 'I gathered that she rather disapproved of it.'

'Foolish girl!' said her mother. 'However, she will have to resign herself to the inevitable.'

Mrs. Chevening stood at the window smiling and kissing her hand while her sister in her heavy furs was stepping daintily along the narrow path. 'Good-bye, good-bye, dearest ones, come again soon!' she was saying, rather to govern her expression than with any hope of being audible. '*What* a pity it is for that poor girl to be so plain! And Gwendolen looks quite twenty years older than when I saw her last. However, I am very glad she came. You see now, Margot, that my own sister doesn't consider I have lost caste, whatever my daughter chooses to think!'

'When you bring Mr. Chadwick to see Aunt Gwendolen, mother,' said Margot, 'shall you take Allen too?'

'I see no necessity for it,' replied her mother; 'he is hardly fit to go into society at present, poor fellow!'

'No,' said Margot, 'but you consider him quite fit for our society, don't you mother?'

'I thought,' said her mother, 'that I was not to have the pain of hearing such language as this from you again, Margot!'

'Mother!' said the girl passionately, 'I can't always keep silence—you must let me speak out sometimes, when we are alone. I do try to treat Mr. Chadwick as you would wish. I—I am even getting not to mind him. But Allen—mother, you can't expect me to feel that he is the sort of person I can bear to think of as a constant companion—as a brother! I know you believe you are doing the best for us all—perhaps you are, for the others—but, at least you might understand that I can't help being a little bitter now and then—just on my own account!'

She stood there, tall and slender, with a look of unconquerable pride on her fair face, and yet her voice had something winning and appealing in it which caused her mother a momentary pang of self-reproach. Mrs. Chevening thought of her future step-son and placed him mentally by the side of this girl—the effect was grotesque enough to arouse a certain sympathy with her daughter's protest.

'Well, well, my dear,' she said, with a little sigh, 'I don't ask

you to feel what perhaps it is not natural that you should feel. I am quite sure that you will see one day that I am right in the course I am taking, and if Allen is the chief objection, Margot,' she added, 'be patient, dearest, a little while. Young men are not generally great stay-at-homes!'

CHAPTER IV.

THE DANGERS OF NOT KNOWING WHEN TO STOP.

It was some time before Lady Yaverland found leisure to fix a day for making the acquaintance of her sister's husband-elect, but she did so at last, and even sent an invitation to dinner. 'It had better be dinner, George,' she had said to her husband. 'I don't want poor Selina to feel herself abandoned, and we need not see anything of them afterwards, you know. And if we don't have them now, we shall have to ask them down to Arreton later!'

'It was a very quiet little dinner—"only just ourselves,"' as Lady Yaverland had explained; even the daughters of the house were not present, and their absence was not accounted for. Perhaps the dinner did not promise to establish any very cordial relations for the future between the principal persons concerned. Chadwick had seen enough of the world not to feel intimidated by the presence of a peer, but he took rather more pains to make this evident than he need have done. In fact, he talked down and contradicted his host so persistently that Lord Yaverland, though the mildest and least exacting of noblemen, became a little restive at last, and his wife deemed it necessary to rebuke the offender. 'Perhaps you don't know, Mr. Chadwick,—and if so I may tell you'—she said, with an ambiguous blandness, 'that the indigo question, and in fact, Indian affairs generally, have been a special study of Lord Yaverland's for some *years*!'

'Can't help that, my lady,' said Chadwick. 'Of course, if his lordship tells me he's *been* there, that's another thing!'

'It has always been a dream of mine,' said the host, 'to visit a country in which I take considerable interest—but, as a matter of fact——'

'You haven't got beyond dreaming at present?' interrupted Chadwick, with his loud laugh. 'That's where it is, you see! Not that you'd know much more about it if you went—they'd show you round, and tell you just as much as they wanted you to know, and, after six weeks of that sort of thing, you'd come back and write an article in a crack magazine, or a book very likely, and think you had settled the whole question. Now I've *been* out there, lived there over twenty years, and I know what I'm talking about, and I tell you, you may take it from *me*——'

'Forgive me, said Lord Yaverland stiffly, 'there are some things I really cannot consent to take from anybody. Selina, was Trouville at all crowded this season?'

Mrs. Chevening saw of course that her future husband was not producing the best of impressions, but she accepted it philosophically enough. She did not care very much whether her sister and she were to be intimate in future or not; their paths had always lain too much apart to make that a very likely contingency; and now, though she was willing that Chadwick should understand that if she was poor she was no adventuress, she did not expect this meeting to lead to anything. Even Chadwick's breaches of the ordinary amenities of life did not cause her any acute distress—he was 'like that,' and it was of no use minding, but she was glad that Margot, who had been included in the invitation, had declined to accompany her—she would not have liked to see the expression she knew her daughter's face would have worn.

When the two sisters were alone together in the great drawing-room, Lady Yaverland began with a little hesitation: 'I hope, Selina,' she said, 'I hope you are quite—*quite* sure that this is a— a wise thing you are going to do!'

'Really, Gwendolen,' retorted Mrs. Chevening, with a rather accelerated beat of her fan, 'I think I may be considered old enough to manage my own affairs. I have been left to manage them for myself all these years!'

'And a dreadful muddle you have made of them!' came into Lady Yaverland's mind, but all she said was, 'You mustn't be angry with me, Selina, I can't help asking, because—because—well, it is so *very* unlike anything I should have expected you to do!'

'It is all very well, Gwendolen,' said Mrs. Chevening. 'I don't pretend that I should have done quite this if I hadn't been so horribly poor. But what was I to do? You know *you* wouldn't have helped me!'

'It is unkind of you to say that,' interposed Lady Yaverland, who felt this thrust to come unpleasantly near home. 'You never asked me—though' (this was due to a recollection that her purse might still be not out of danger) 'I assure you I have so many claims upon me that I often don't know where to turn for money myself. However, it is different for you now—you will not be horribly poor any longer at all events!'

'No, I suppose not. And really he is very good!'

'I don't doubt it for a moment, and of course, as you say, you are the best judge—I dare say you will be very happy.'

In parting Chadwick gave his host and hostess a pressing invitation to visit them at his place at Gorsecombe after the marriage. 'Always pleased to see any of Selina's family, my lord,' he assured him. 'Just drop us a line a day or two before to say we're to expect you, and you may depend upon us to let you know if it's inconvenient—run down when you can, and no ceremony.'

To which Lady Yaverland had replied somewhat frostily for herself and her husband, that 'Mr. Chadwick was too kind—but they so seldom paid any visits now.'

'An offensive fellow, Gwen!' Lord Yaverland remarked when his guests were gone. 'Don't know when I've seen a more offensive fellow. What on earth possessed Selina to take up with him?'

'Poor dear Selina!' said his wife, 'she has her girls to think of. He's very well off, I understand. I'm afraid we can't know them, though.'

'I couldn't stand him at Arreton, I know that. Selina must come alone if she comes at all.'

'She won't expect it; she is very sensible about some things. We have done our duty, at least; we can run up for the wedding, you know—I'm afraid you've had a boring evening, George?'

'Well, my dear, I did find him a trifle fatiguing.'

'Think what it will be for poor Selina!'

'That's *her* look-out,' said Lord Yaverland, as he retired to his library. At about the same time Chadwick, as he escorted Mrs. Chevening home, was reviewing the evening with complacency.

'I think, Selina,' he was saying, 'I gave his lordship a wrinkle or two' (a surmise which was more literally correct than he imagined). 'I tackled him about India—did you hear me? I always get my monkey up when I hear these swells laying down the law about indigo, when all the time they don't know the difference between a ryot and a gantidar! Still, I hope I was civil, eh?'

'I think, if anything, you were almost too—too respectful in some ways,' hazarded Mrs. Chevening. 'George isn't accustomed to be called "my lord" quite so often.'

'Why, I threw it in from time to time, just to show I remembered the difference in rank between us,' cried Chadwick. 'God bless my soul, Selina, do you suppose I don't know how to behave—even if I *have* lived amongst niggers all my life? You seem to think I'm an ignorant boor by the way you talk, hanged if you don't!'

'Indeed, Joshua, I never thought any such thing!' protested Mrs. Chevening, who saw that his pride was seriously ruffled, 'and I'm sure George was very much struck by all you said—I thought you were so right about things.'

'Right? I should think I *was* right!' said Chadwick, mollified at once. 'He knocked under completely after you went. I've taken rather a fancy to him, I must say, and your sister seems a pleasant woman—stiffer than I care about—but pleasant.'

'Gwendolen *can* be very pleasant,' said her sister.

'Well,' said Chadwick, 'I can't trot out any lords on *my* side of the family, Selina, but perhaps we're none the worse for that. Not that I've any objection to lords as such, but I don't run after 'em, and I'm in no hurry for them to run after *me*!'

'I scarcely think you are likely to suffer any annoyance of that

kind,' Mrs. Chevening could not help retorting—to which he replied in all sincerity, that he 'did not advise any lord to try it on.'

Christmas approached, the last they were all to spend at Osier House, which fact alone would have been enough to spoil the day in anticipation for Margot, even if the party at the dinner-table were not to be joined by Allen and his father. Chadwick had engaged quarters for Christmas at a hotel in Chiswick, and it was arranged that Allen should come up and share them. He was almost as much at the house as his father, and it fell to the girls' lot to entertain him, which they found as irksome a task as ever. Margot had schooled herself once more to behave to him with a kind of severe tolerance, and, as usual, he accepted this as a symptom of growing friendliness, and responded with what disdainful Margot chose to consider odious familiarity—though, could she have known it, there was nothing but the purest respect and admiration in his feelings for her.

However, she could not, or would not, see it, and escaped from the infliction of his company as often as she could, sometimes soothing her irritation by lonely walks along the quaint old-world streets and alleys by the riverside between Hammersmith and Kew bridges; for Margot preferred, when in these moods, to walk alone.

She had gone out one afternoon a day or two before Christmas, and followed the road which, after striking inland to save a curve of the bank, returns again to the river through one of the most picturesque of old suburban streets.

How she loved it now—this irregular winding thoroughfare of old brick houses, with projecting corbelled roofs, whose white-sashed windows must have seen Hogarth's sturdy figure pass and repass many a time! The little shops were bright with Christmas cheer; in the greengrocer's window stood the little figure of Father Christmas, which had made its annual reappearance there every year she had been in Chiswick—it would come out again next year, no doubt, but she would not be there to see. The grim old mansions further on showed a glimpse of warmth and firelight through the tall windows, and here, at the end of the lane, was the church, and through a gap the river showed a dull lead-colour, with oily eddies and flaws on its swollen surface, and the faint outlines of trees on the opposite bank; a tug, with a trail of barges in its wake, came panting and puffing down, as if protesting against overwork. It was still light, the day had been mild for the season, and the rain had not long cleared; Margot walked on, unwilling to turn back just then, her whole thoughts absorbed in self-pity. She had left the river again, had passed a timber-yard, where a log was screaming like a hurt animal under the whirr of the steam-saw, and now she had come to a quiet old terrace, which, reserving its best side for the river, presents the anomalous appearance of having all its front doors at the back. At the end of this row of quaint, diminutive, pillared porches and irregularly placed windows, she had resolved to turn, but before she reached it, someone came

towards her from the narrow lane in front, and, with a curious mixture of feeling, she saw that it was Nugent Orme.

Orme, of course, had been at least as quick in recognising her, in spite of the failing light and the partial disguise of her winter wraps. People who had once known Miss Chevening were not apt to pass her by, and, as it chanced, he was thinking of her at that very moment. To tell the truth, this was not the first time he had taken this walk of late, and with a faint undefined expectation of some such encounter as this, though hitherto only to experience the puzzling fact that the last place, as a rule, to find people one is anxious to meet, is the neighbourhood where they happen to dwell.

This time he had a definite reason for turning his steps in that direction, as he had to see somebody at Chiswick, though he had set out to walk there by the longer way along the river bank, less with any real hope of seeing Miss Chevening than to please his fancy once more with the endeavour to identify her house among the many comfortable old houses by the riverside with the trees darkening their verandahed fronts.

From this it will be perceived that the impression Miss Chevening had left on him was deeper after all than he had been disposed to believe at the time. He was constantly making efforts to call up her features and expression exactly; sometimes with a tantalising flash of success, generally with results distressing by their vagueness. He speculated about her a good deal, too, going back often in fancy to that delicious scene of reconciliation on his last night, and trying to penetrate her motives. If only he could be quite sure she was as anxious to keep his friendship as she seemed—if only she was as frank and unaffected as he had believed at the time—if she had not been practising on him for some reason or other! All this did not affect either his rest or his appetite, but it gave his leisure thoughts an interest, a pervading romance and sentiment which had not begun to fade as yet.

Now he saw her again, and instantly felt how faithlessly and inadequately his memory had served him—the reality was so far more charming, there was so much that he had unaccountably forgotten! That blending in her of the imperious young goddess and the wilful child, for instance, had escaped him utterly till he saw her now. She smiled at him as she held out her hand; her eyes were kind, though her mouth was a little tremulous, and she looked less buoyant and less happy than he remembered her; she had not forgotten him, but he fancied she was not altogether glad to see him just then.

‘Is this one of your haunts?’ she inquired, as they stood there.

He explained, without thinking it necessary to mention that it was not his first visit, that he had to call at Chiswick hotel on business of his father’s.

‘Do you know that you have chosen the most roundabout way to get there?’

'Have I really?' he said hypocritically; 'however, it is too late to alter that now.'

'You *might* reach the main road from here if you are pressed for time, but it is much the uglier way certainly. I was just turning back, so, if you like, we might walk together part of the way, and I could put you in the right road.'

Miss Chevening did not know, and I am afraid did not greatly care, how far she was warranted by the proprieties in making this offer. At first, the pain of meeting him had outweighed the pleasure, and her impulse had been to pass on after a few commonplace words, and go back by a different way. But when she saw the very evident pleasure in his eyes, she had not the heart for this—it would be pleasant after all to talk with him again, even though it was all so changed now.

How gratefully and gladly he accepted need not be said. He had found her again, more kind and more beautiful than ever; he was walking by her side, and she was talking to him with the old sweet brusqueness, and a delicate note of sadness in her voice sometimes that endeared her more to him than any gaiety.

'It seems years ago since the Trouville days,' she said, and added: 'I mean so many things have happened since—to me at least.' She was wondering—half hopefully—if he had heard; she was sure he would be sorry for her.

'Pleasant things, I hope?' he said. He knew nothing, then—could she bring herself to tell him?

'No, indeed; nothing will ever be pleasant any more!' said Miss Chevening, in a tone of mournful conviction.

'I am so sorry—so sincerely sorry,' he said gently. 'I hardly dare to ask questions, but—it is not illness?'

'Nothing to do with illness. We—we shall have to leave our pretty old house, for one thing.'

'You are not leaving England?' he asked anxiously.

'No—I almost wish we were, instead of—but I can't tell you just now. I will try to tell you presently, if I am able. Now, tell me about yourself, and all that you have been doing since we parted.'

Seeing that she evidently meant to change the subject, he gave her as much of his history during the past months as was likely to be of any interest to her, and she listened and made comments which he thought showed a delightful interest in his proceedings, and by-and-by they passed to general topics. And they walked on, past Chiswick Mall (where she professed to know the very house where Miss Pinkerton had once kept her celebrated academy, and the gate through which the Sedley coach had driven that summer day with Amelia and Becky Sharp inside, and black Sambo behind), past the church, and the little angle of eighteenth-century buildings, with the more modern, but still old-fashioned, shops below the red brick bulging fronts and high brown roofs; the butcher's, with its Christmas show of red and white joints; the grocer's, with

the heat of the gas made a misty blur on the small-paned shop-fronts. Then into gloom again, under the bulging ivy-topped walls of private parks, with glimpses through the railings of green and mildewed statues, looking slightly uncanny in the gathering gloom; and, here and there, amongst the shadowy trunks and tree-tops, a great cedar rising in darker outline against the grey background. Then along a lonely road facing the west, where a gleam of stormy yellow showed that the sun was setting, and on till the river came in sight once more, and the willows and poplars were delicately traced against a sunset sky which had suddenly become mottled with vivid patches of olive, grey, green, crocus and blue.

They met scarcely anybody; this old-world region, though surrounded by building estates, and villas, and flaring new shops, seems forgotten, untouched amidst so much change—given over for a little longer to dignified decay and ghostly memories of past grandeur; there was a strange intimate charm to him in walking there with her in the silence and solitude, something dreamy and poetic in the place which both felt.

‘You are not very far from your journey’s end now, Mr. Orme,’ she said, with a return to practical life, as they entered the region of brick and stucco once more, and saw the tall mass of the water-tower painted in faint grey monochrome upon the green evening sky. ‘I will show you a short cut which will take you to the hotel.’

‘The hotel?’ he said abstractedly; ‘to be sure, I was going there. That reminds me’ (the young man was glad to catch at any excuses for prolonging the conversation), ‘I don’t think I mentioned who it is I am going to see. You remember the Chadwicks, at the Californie—?’

‘Very well,’ she said—the possibility that he was going to call on Mr. Chadwick had already occurred to her—she had expected this, and tried to avert it. Now it had come.

‘I remember,’ he said, ‘that they were not favourites of yours, still it may interest you to hear that the father is going to marry again.’

She would tell him in a moment—not yet; she put off her revelation, not unwilling that he should be impressed by her stoicism. ‘It does interest me—very much,’ she said, with her enigmatic smile. ‘Do you—have you heard who the lady is?’

‘Only the mere fact at present, and not even that till a day or two ago. I am sorry for that poor young fellow.’

‘Sorry—sorry for *him*?’ Miss Chevening flamed out suddenly. ‘I should have thought other persons were more to be pitied.’

‘So you haven’t forgiven him even yet!’ he said, smiling at this proof that the old petulant prejudice was still alive; ‘aren’t you rather hard on him, Miss Chevening?’

‘But why should *he* be the person to be pitied for his father’s second marriage?’ she persisted.

The pleasantest conversations generally have a stage at which we could wish, afterwards, they had ended—little as he knew it, Orme was passing that stage now.

‘Well, you see,’ he explained, ‘he’s an only son, and—well, I gathered from what I was told that the lady who is going to marry his father was not doing so out of disinterested affection exactly. And, though you will probably decline to believe that anybody would marry him for love, a woman who does it for money is not likely to prove the best conceivable step-mother, is she?’

They were standing together at the point where the riverside path begins again—though the road is continued inland. In the pain, the indignant surprise, and shame which that imprudent speech of his had excited, all impulse to enlighten him vanished. Where now was the compassion—the respectful and admiring compassion—she had looked for? How could she tell him, after that! Was this how the world would look at it? Oh, the world was cruel and stupid, and she hated it! The scene around her suddenly became dreary and dismal—she hated it all; the humble little riverside cottages and ancient taverns, the muddy path, the dim black barges close in under the bank, between which the water was swashing and gurgling mournfully, the pale river gliding by, the ugly lattice bridge over which a train, a long line of yellow bars, was passing, repeated in the water below, all seemed an appropriate background to her wretchedness at that moment.

‘I—I don’t agree with you at all,’ she said tremulously; ‘it is *you* who are not charitable now! And,’ she added, recovering her dignity, ‘I will say good-bye here, please, Mr. Orme.’

He felt that her manner had altered, that he had received his dismissal, but he did not suspect the extent of his offence. She never could mention young Chadwick without that hostility; he ought to have known better, he reflected, as he went on alone, but with no serious uneasiness. Nothing could dash his spirits just then—he had found her again—his beautiful, unforgettable friend, and he had new recollections to live upon until he saw her again—for that he should see her again, he was certain! She was more delightful than ever, less abrupt and imperious, gentler and more subdued. He must not let himself fall in love with her—that was out of the question as yet—but what if, some day—? For a man who was not admittedly in love he found a pleasure in dwelling upon the possibility of becoming so which might have caused him to beware. But perhaps he no longer wished to beware. He had known when he set out to walk that afternoon, so he told himself now, that this afternoon was not to be as any common afternoon.

Margot went on her way in a very different frame of mind: she had been punished, she thought bitterly, for her desire to enjoy Nugent Orme’s companionship once more for a little while! When he knew that he had been speaking slightly to her of her own mother, what would he feel? Would it make him despise them all? And then she remembered his manner when they met by

the terrace that afternoon—he *did* like her, she was certain, he had been very glad to see her again, he would be horrified with himself when he knew, and he would be sorry for her. It was useless trying to feel angry with him, he had offended in perfect innocence. She felt that she might be sure of a staunch friend in him. But now she would be leaving London very soon, and then she would lose sight of him—this time altogether perhaps! It might have been so different if—if it were not for this marriage, and, as she reached this point in her meditations, all her displeasure as usual concentrated itself upon one unconscious and unoffending head.

CHAPTER V.

A MODUS VIVENDI.

On s'ennuie toujours avec les gens avec qui il n'est pas permis de s'ennuyer.—*La Rochefoucauld*.

MISS CHEVENING had very little farther to go; after passing a quaint old inn, with a cheery glow behind its striped blinds, an irregular and incongruous row of buildings—small shops, cottages and at intervals a house of some importance, all standing within a few feet of the river bank—she stopped at a gate close behind which a steep flight of stone steps led up to a door between two slender columns supporting an overhanging bay, and this was Osier House, her home for only a very little while longer.

The door was opened by a housemaid, who was in secret a severe trial to Margot, so far was she from coming up to the West-End standard of domestic smartness and neatness.

'Why, you *have* had a walk, miss!' said this handmaiden, with a cheerful grin, which Margot would have preferred to see exchanged for a cleaner apron; however, all that did not matter much now.

'Yes,' she said; 'have you brought up tea yet, Anne?'

'Why no! I ain't on'y just come down from tidying myself, miss,' said this unblushing person; 'but I'm going to bring the younger ones theirs in the schoolroom; will you take yours there, or up in the doring-room with the mistress? Mr. Chadwick, *he'll* be in soon.'

'In the schoolroom,' Miss Chevening interrupted quickly; and, her serenity very far from recovered, she went into the schoolroom, where she found them all engaged over some round game of cards.

'Quite a happy family!' she exclaimed with a touch of her habitual disdain, when she saw that Allen was amongst the party.

'Mother said we were to play,' explained Lettice; 'don't you think we could stop now, Margot?' she asked in a plaintive voice.

'It is *so* unpleasant playing with anybody who cheats whenever he can!' struck in Ida. 'I saw him taking my counters.'

'It was only for a lark, Margot,' Allen protested; 'it's not as if we were playing for money.'

'You do draw that distinction, then!' said Margot; 'but why cheat at all? It's not generally considered part of the fun—at least not with us!'

'I won't cheat any more,' said Allen, 'if you'll come and play too, Margot?'

'Not even that inducement tempts me,' she returned; 'and, Camilla, I fancy you might let them leave off now; they seem tired of it.'

'Well,' said Miss Henderson, 'if Mr. Allen will excuse us, I do think the game has lasted long enough.'

'I didn't want to play cards,' said Allen, who had certainly been given small reason to enjoy this particular game, 'it was your mother set us down to it.'

'Mother didn't know you wouldn't play fair,' said Lettice, who attached a serious importance to winning counters; 'that spoils everything!'

'Yes,' said Reggie, 'it's cheating to look at your cards before playing, and that's what you did everytime; if *you* cheat, we ought all to cheat, or it's not fair!'

'I've told you it was all by way of a joke like!' said Allen; 'but of course I can't do anything to please you—I'm ready enough to stop, I can tell you.'

He was more irritated than usual, for his cheating had been a very obvious and simple performance, due to some blundering idea of promoting the hilarity, which struck him as wanting, for some reason. He was not aware that the humour of an unpopular person must be irresistible indeed to extort success, but then he was not aware either how unpopular he was.

He could not take his eyes from Margot as she stood there, with the delicate colour in her cheeks freshened by her walk; he had hoped she would join them, and, perhaps, take his part against the rest, for he always felt as if he knew her best, and it made him very sore that she, too, should seem to turn against him.

'Please don't let us all lose our tempers,' said Margot; 'they don't understand your peculiar notions about games of chance, Allen, that is all.'

'Now you're bringing that Petits Chevaux business up again!' he said, almost savagely; 'haven't I told you how that was? I didn't think you'd throw that in my teeth, Margot!'

'I had no intention of throwing anything in your teeth,' she returned haughtily; 'they have had enough of cards for this evening, as you must see by this time.'

'Perhaps you've had enough of *me* too?' he asked roughly, though his voice quivered.

Margot shrugged her shoulders. 'No one has said so,' she answered; 'stay by all means, if you like to behave yourself.'

'I *won't* stay!' said Allen,—'not to be treated this way. I'm willing enough to be pleasant—but you're all against me, every one of you! Anyone would think I wasn't fit to come near you. You forget it's my father who——'

Margot's eyes gleamed with anger as she held open the door. 'Will you kindly go out of the room before you say another word?' she said, very quietly.

He was cowed in an instant. 'I—I wasn't going to say anything,' he said; 'you—you *drive* me to it—you're so precious hard on a chap!'

'Go!' was all Margot said: and he went, out of the room and out of the house, with a feeling that he was in hopeless disgrace.

The girls looked at one another blankly as the front door slammed. 'We *have* done it now,' said Ida; 'he will tell mother, and she'll be awfully angry; you know how particularly she told us not to quarrel with him.'

'He may tell mother, if he wishes to,' said Margot. 'What a delightful, loveable brother he will make! We ought to be very grateful girls!'

Allen was walking back to the hotel, the only place he could go to, with a growing sense of injustice. He liked them all so much—and they would not like him! and now they had made him lose his temper and say things (or very nearly say them) that he had never meant to do. What had possessed him, and how could he regain Margot's good opinion? He quite believed he was winning it till then, and he could not bear his life if she would not forgive him.

Someone was just leaving the hotel as he came up; he heard his father's voice calling from the portico—'Good-bye, glad you came over, and you may tell your father what I said.'

Then a tall, well-set-up figure was about to pass him.

'Orme!' cried Allen, 'I say—Mr. Orme!'

Orme stopped. 'So you're at Chiswick too!' he said; 'why, I haven't seen you since our Trouville time; how are things with you, old fellow?'

There was a kindness in his voice that went to Allen's heart just then. 'They're bad,' he said dolefully,—'beastly bad. I'm that wretched, Orme, I can't bear myself!'

Orme drew his arm within his. 'Tell us all about it,' he said encouragingly.

'You've heard my father's going to get married again?' began Allen.

'I have just been told, and to whom!' replied Orme, wincing slightly; he was a little hurt at Margot's reticence, and just beginning to recall with shame his own rash and unpardonable

remarks. 'But I can't see,' he continued, 'that you've any reason to be so wretched as that, though I know it's hard perhaps at first.'

Then Allen confided to him the cause of his unhappiness, and the scene which had just taken place. 'I should be nothing but pleased about it,' he concluded, 'if Margot—if *they'd* only show signs of coming round; but they're all against me; I can't satisfy them, do what I will! Mrs. Chevening, she's the only one now that speaks me civil.'

Orme could not help making excuses for Miss Chevening in his heart; he knew the strength of her prejudices, and perhaps he felt what it must be to her to have to receive this unfortunate neglected boy as her equal; he had been as prejudiced himself not so very long ago—he pitied both sides, and her not less of the two.

But he did his best to smooth matters. 'Look here,' he said, 'don't make too much of this—you mustn't expect to get on with them quite at once. Have patience, and it will all come right. All you have to do is to wait. I wouldn't appear to force myself on them, you know. Remember, it's a great change for them as well as for you, they will feel that for a little time—it's natural!'

'But Margot's had plenty of time to get used to me!' said Allen; 'I thought she was used to me—and now she's as hard on me as the rest of 'em.'

'Miss Chevening is—is quick-tempered, I dare say,' said Nugent, 'but she's generous too. When she sees that you really want to be on good terms with them all, and only ask to be met half-way, depend upon it she will be kinder; she doesn't understand that quite yet.'

'If I could only think that, I wouldn't mind,' he declared; 'she might treat me as unkind as she chose, I'd bear it cheerful! I *would*, Orme, so long as she came round in the end. What I'm so unhappy about is, that p'raps she never *will* come round!'

'She will, my dear fellow,' said Orme; 'I'll answer for it she will, if you're patient. Meet her as if all this had not happened, and let her see that you are ready to forget it and be friends if she chooses, but leave it to her to make any advances.'

'I will,' said Allen; 'I'll do that—thank you, Orme, but I don't believe it'll be any use. I know *I'd* be glad enough if it would!'

Orme parted from him at the Gunnersbury Station with a deeper pity. 'Poor young fellow!' he was thinking, 'I wonder if I gave him the right advice—I hope I have. She can so well afford to treat him decently, with all the advantages on her side. I don't believe she can be bad-hearted, with that face! Still, he will have a good deal to overcome.' And then he occupied himself with the more personal consideration of whether he, too, had offended irremediably that afternoon. 'If I had known, I would have cut my tongue out sooner than make that infernally foolish speech!' he thought irritably; 'but who could have thought such a thing possible? There, it's no use thinking of it!'

As he went back to his rooms his expedition began to appear more eventful than satisfactory. 'We're both in the same boat,' he told himself grimly, 'except that he has a chance of putting himself right with her, and I haven't—unless it comes at the Vicarage some day.'

Chadwick came in that evening as usual. 'Christmas will be on us very soon now,' he remarked (he had a talent for platitude). 'Day after to-morrow. Well, it will be rather a different sort of Christmas from the ones I've had to spend for the last twenty years!'

'A pleasanter, I nope!' said Mrs. Chevening.

'Ah, you may say that. Why, last year, except a half-share in a concern that hadn't paid for eighteen months, I wasn't worth a rupee. I didn't keep Christmas much out there, I can tell you. But they take care you don't forget it in the old country. You wouldn't believe the number of begging letters I get, which reminds me—you'll be interested in this, young lady,' he added, turning to Margot, who knew what was coming and tried hard to seem indifferent,—'who d'ye suppose now I had calling on me this afternoon?—someone you've met. Give a guess.'

'I never was clever at guessing!' replied Margot, hoping that her face was not betraying her.

'Well, I thought you'd have guessed this—it was that clever young tutor fellow I got for my boy. Came about some fund or other, his father, the Vicar, got me to say I'd do something for. Young Orme didn't know who was to be the second Mrs. Chadwick till I told him, Selina. A rare surprise it was to him to find she'd turned out to be an old friend of his!'

'Really, Joshua,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'I should hardly call him a friend of mine. I never particularly noticed him.'

'Ah, and I suppose I shall hear now that Miss Margot didn't notice him particularly either!'

'Of course I noticed him,' said Margot calmly; 'I saw and spoke to him several times—he was one of your friends. What then?'

'Nothing that I know of,' answered Chadwick, who was not quite at ease with this stately step-daughter of his. 'I asked him to come back with me and have a talk about old times with you two ladies, but he said he must get back to town.'

'I can't profess to be sorry to have missed him,' said Mrs. Chevening; 'he was not the sort of young man that I take much interest in; and besides, we are not likely to see anything of him again.'

'I don't know that,' said Chadwick; 'he'll be down at the Vicarage sometimes, I dare say, for the holidays; he's going down to-morrow, he said. I thought I told you his father was the Vicar of Gorsecombe.'

Margot listened, and all at once, for some reason, she could not account for, her lot seemed to have grown more supportable. She

found comfort, excitement even, in the thought that her mother's marriage would bring her nearer to someone who she instinctively felt admired her, whose good opinion she valued, whose sympathy she desired.

He would be there now and then to see the trials she would have to submit to, and her heroism under them—for of course she would be heroic. She forgot the humiliation she had felt at the idea of his learning her changed fortunes. After all, it was through no fault of hers—why hadn't she told him herself at once? she fancied she knew what had led him to decline Mr. Chadwick's offer to bring him to Osier House, and liked him the better for it.

Altogether, when Allen came in presently, full of misgivings but resolved to carry out Orme's advice, he found, to his joy and surprise, that it was no longer necessary. Margot seemed entirely to have forgotten her recent displeasure, and was gentler and more nearly cordial than he had ever known her yet. She even began a conversation with him of her own accord, while their respective parents were discussing some decorator's plans at the other end of the room, and for the first time she condescended to show an interest in the neighbourhood they were all to live in. If her questions reverted from time to time to the Vicarage and its occupants, he was not likely to notice that under the new sensation of finding his remarks received with attentive interest.

He took this to be a sign that her heart smote her with a sense that she had been unkind, and that she had set herself to make amends. It was true what Orme had said—she was generous, but, whether kind or cruel, generous or unforgiving, she exercised a power over him that would be hard to destroy.

Christmas passed, the new year outwore its novelty, and, according to the calendar, winter was already giving place to spring, though shrivelling winds and black frosts gave an even more bitterly ironical turn than usual to the season of promise and hope.

But at Osier House Miss Chevening had other things to occupy her thoughts than the state of the weather; her mother's marriage was to take place at the end of the month, and time was rushing on in a whirl of preparation in which she could not avoid being more or less involved, however she tried to keep aloof.

Mrs. Chevening always resented the indifference her eldest daughter displayed in the arrangements that were being made in their future home. She would come home after having been absent all day, superintending the redecoration and furnishing which she had persuaded Chadwick were indispensable, and would find Margot provokingly uninterested.

'Really, the house looks quite a different place already!' she would say. 'I've chosen the sweetest paper for *your* room, dearest one, with a pattern of all willow leaves in blended tints of pale olive—quite simple, but *so* pretty!'

'Have you, dear?' Margot would answer; 'thank you.'

'I wanted you to choose for yourself, you know, but you wouldn't,

you idle child.' (It was not idleness, as her mother knew very well, though she chose to consider it so.) 'Now do rouse yourself from that chair and come here and say what you think you would like to go with the paper—here are all the patterns.'

'I can't tell without having seen the paper.'

'I kept a piece on purpose—there, I'll save you the trouble of coming, I'll bring the patterns to you. Am I not a good mother?'

Margot would turn over the little books with listless white fingers for a few moments, and then give them back, saying, 'I really don't mind what it is, mother; choose what you think best and I shall be quite satisfied.'

'That is not a very grateful return for Mr. Chadwick's kindness—he was particularly anxious that your tastes should be considered in every way.'

'Was he? It is kind of him; but really I've no preferences.'

'Then am I to tell the upholsterer's man he may put up what he pleases?'

'If you like, dear,' Miss Chevening would reply languidly; and then, with more animation, '*Not* the upholsterer's man, mother! *You* choose for me!'

'Indeed, my dear, if you do not think it worth taking some trouble about, yourself, I certainly shall not worry about it.'

'Well, I *will* just look at the patterns and paper once more,' Miss Chevening was reduced to saying humbly, with a sense of being untrue to herself.

Margot had resolved beforehand that, if she was compelled to enter the house of bondage, she would not at least be so compliant as to betray any interest in the appointments of her prison-chamber. Perhaps, however, she felt that she could place reliance upon her mother's taste; whereas that not unskilful mention of the upholsterer had shattered all her apathy at a blow.

On one other point, too, she had been roused to disregard her personal dignity. Her mother had hinted at keeping Anne in her service as a maid for her daughters. This was more than Miss Chevening's philosophy could stand.

'Please, not Anne, dear!' she said.

'She seemed so anxious to come,' said her mother; 'she's been with us eighteen months, and she's a very respectable girl. I thought you liked her, dear.'

'Oh, I like her very well,' replied Margot, 'but I don't want a maid.'

'If you don't, Ida and Lettie will, as nurse is going.'

'Well, then,' said Margot, driven desperate, 'if we must have one, do let us have somebody about us who is nice and attractive to look at. I couldn't bear to let Anne touch me! Surely, *now*, we can have maids like other people?'

'Anne is a dreadful slattern, certainly. If I advertise, will you see the people when they come for the place?'

'No, dear, you see them,' pleaded Margot; 'I shouldn't know

in the least what to say to them, or ask them, I'm so helpless in all these things.'

So she obtained her own way, without having to undertake any personal exertion. She was weak after all; even her opposition to the marriage was not so strong as it had been. She caught herself sometimes forming plans and anticipations for the new life with a fickleness which she despised. There were moments when she actually had to remind herself of the unparalleled indignity to which she would be constantly exposed, and the surest means of doing so was to think of Allen Chadwick, who little suspected his efficacy as a mental stimulant.

And now the remaining days of Mrs. Chevening's widowhood had dwindled to very few indeed; the banns had been twice read out in the church by the riverside. Margot had heard them announced once with downcast eyes and hot cheeks—'between Joshua Smithson Chadwick, widower, of the parish of Gorsecombe, Pineshire, and Selina Letitia Chevening, widow, of this parish.' There was no just cause or impediment except to the mind of the girl who sat there with the vision before her of a neglected grave far away on a forgotten Asian battlefield.

'I suppose,' said Chadwick one evening, 'it isn't the right thing to have bridesmaids—eh, Selina?'

'Surely you know that!' was the answer.

'Well, I'm not up in these matters—the only time I went through it we got it done at a Registry office. But there's no harm in treating the two elder girls as bridesmaids in one respect, I dare say?'

Margot, who, with Ida, was in the room at the time, looked up quickly.

'I don't in the least know what you mean,' said her mother.

Chadwick was feeling in his pockets with a comfortable sort of chuckle.

'Why, I don't profess, as I said, to know about these things, but I understand it's usual for the happy man to give the bridesmaids a small present, just to remember the occasion by. So,' here he tossed a packet into Margot's lap and another upon the sofa where Ida was sitting, 'there's yours, and there's *yours*.'

'Joshua,' cried Mrs. Chevening, 'how kind you are to my poor girls—they haven't words to thank you just yet . . . it is really too—too good of you to think of them!'

Margot was opening the parcel with reluctant deliberation; inside was a morocco case, which she found to contain a locket. It was of immense size and solidity, and in the centre was a large carbuncle set in turquoises and an enamelled border. It was costly and it was undeniably hideous. She gazed at it in dismay.

'Handsome articles, aren't they?' said Chadwick complacently. 'They're both alike. I told the jeweller to make me a duplicate, so that you shouldn't say I made any distinctions

between you. I think your mother would like to have a look when you've done, young lady.'

It is always embarrassing to express gratitude in words, but never more so, perhaps, than when we are called upon to thank someone we do not like for something we do not want.

Margot would have given anything to be able to refuse this gift, especially as it was not an ornament she could bring herself to wear, but she knew that anything but acceptance was impossible. She crossed to where Chadwick was sitting and held out her hand meekly. 'I can only say "Thank you,"' she said.

'Well, well,' he replied; 'I know young ladies are fond of finery—mind, you take care of it, that's all. But aren't you going to give me a kiss for it?'

Margot cast an appealing glance at her mother, who judged it better to interpose.

'Margot never was a kissing person, Joshua, so I think you must excuse her. I'm sure she is very, very grateful for so—so handsome a present—aren't you, darling?'

'Yes, mother,' said Margot, escaping with relief.

Ida, who had not been equally fortunate, joined her presently in a little sitting-room at the back.

'Aren't they dreadful, Margot?' she exclaimed.

'Hideous!' said Miss Chevening, opening the case containing her own locket, and regarding it with unconcealed distaste. 'Why must he give us anything, and why such things as these?'

'Shall you wear yours, Margot?'

'Wear it?' exclaimed Miss Chevening. Wear *this*! How could I? I wish it wasn't wrong to want to throw it into the river. No, I shall have to keep it, but I will not—I simply will *not* wear it!'

'Is that the way you talk of presents when they're given you?' said a voice from the doorway. It was Allen's; he had come up to the hotel again that week and had been in the drawing-room, a witness to the presentation scene, though the girls had not noticed him at the time. Now he had followed them out with a hope of receiving some thanks for his own share in the transaction, which consisted in helping his father in the difficult work of selection.

'You were not intended to hear what we said,' said Miss Chevening loftily.

'You spoke loud enough,' he said, 'and the door was left open—but look here, what's the matter with the lockets?'

'Nothing,' said Margot, 'nothing is the matter with the lockets—they are very big and expensive and handsome.'

'That's what I should have said. Why won't you wear them, then?'

'You don't understand these things,' said Margot, feeling it useless to deny her words. 'Girls of our—of our age, don't wear expensive jewels like these.'

'They're not so expensive as they look,' said the candid Allen,

'Expensive or not, they are not the sort of things that are worn—that was all we meant.'

'Then I'll tell the governor, and get him to have them changed,' he proposed.

'If you wish to make mischief, do so; but I warn you that, if you say a word of what you had no right to listen to at all, I will never speak to you again if I can help it. I mean it, Allen.'

'I didn't mean it for mischief, only to do you a good turn,' he protested; 'but if you don't want me to say anything, why, I won't, and there's an end of it. Why do you always try to make out that I'm intending what never came in my head?'

'Don't let it come into your head, then.'

'Well,' he said, 'whether you wear those lockets or not, they're worth something, you know. They aren't expensive, considering they look so showy; but you could sell them each any day in the week for fifteen pounds a-piece at the very least—any jeweller 'd give you that for 'em!'

'It is a pity that so much money has been wasted upon us said Margot, lifting her chin, 'because, you see, we are not in the habit of selling our jewellery, whether we are able to wear it or not.'

'Of course, I know you wouldn't do it yourselves,' he said; 'but you might want money on a sudden some day. I'd manage it all for you. I've had to do it with things of my own now and then. It's useful to know—that's all I meant.'

'When I think proper to entrust you with any of my belongings to dispose of,' returned Miss Chevening, with freezing dignity, 'I shall let you know. I am not quite reduced to that just yet.'

'There's nothing to be offended at,' he said, between shame and sullenness: 'none was intended, I'm sure.'

'There is no use in being offended. If you could only understand that money is not the principal object in life, your conversation would be so much pleasanter to listen to, that's all.'

'I dare say, if all was known, I'm not more set on money than other people,' he retorted. 'I've known what it was to want it. Tell me what I can say that will be pleasant to listen to, and I'll try to oblige.'

'Then I will,' said Margot. 'It would be very pleasant to hear you say, well—something of this sort: "I'm afraid I am interrupting you, so I'll leave you to finish your talk."'

'Ah!' he said bitterly, 'you don't try to make *your* conversation over-pleasant, anyhow. I suppose that's a hint for me to go?'

'You are getting quite quick at seeing things, Allen,' remarked Ida.

Margot began to be afraid she had said too much. 'No, but, Allen,' she said, more gently, 'don't think it unkind, but we really would rather be alone just now.'

'If you'd spoken like that at first,' he said, 'I wouldn't have minded. I don't wish to stay where I'm not wanted, only I like to be treated civil.'

'We will treat you "civil," then,' said Margot, holding out her hand. 'There, good night, Allen . . . Oh, how rough you are, you have crushed my hand!'

'I—I didn't mean to. I can't do anything right, I know. Good-night.'

And one dull, bleak day in March, with a low grey-green sky from which a few small snowflakes fell occasionally and a dry lead-coloured haze that was more depressing than fog, Mrs. Chevening was united in holy wedlock to Joshua Chadwick in the church on the river-bank, and the tradesmen of Chiswick and Turnham Green, though they refrained from any open manifestations, rejoiced inwardly with an exceeding great joy.

Margot was in the church and heard her mother pronounce the word which assigned herself and them to a strange and unknown power. Lettice was there, and said afterwards that it would have been much more cheerful if they had only lighted the 'chanticleer.' Ida wept in torrents with the luxury of really having something to weep for. Allen was there in the lightest of his gloves and trousers, like a super at one of the interrupted weddings on the stage. Lord and Lady Yaverland honoured the ceremony with their presence and left early.

That is all that need be said here of that wedding, important as the stage is which it marks in this history.

Still a little later and the last farewell had been said to the dear old house of which the Chevening family had during their mother's honeymoon—as that period must, however inappropriately, be called—been in undisturbed possession.

They had arrived at their new home, Agra House. Even Miss Chevening was compelled to own in her private mind that it might have been much worse. It was big, and florid, and pretentious, but it had been designed with a view to comfort, and now the interior had been decorated and furnished according to her mother's directions, and contained nothing to offend the eye. The grounds too were large and well laid out.

There was a surprise in store for Miss Chevening. When she rang for her maid, the girl her mother had engaged in place of cashiered homely Anne, the face of the person who answered her ring seemed strangely and not quite pleasantly familiar. At last she remembered. 'I think,' she observed carelessly, 'we last met on board the Littlehampton steamer, and you were extremely uncivil.'

Susan, for it was the same girl whom she had heard abusing little Henri on the Trouville *plage*, reddened under her freckles. 'Was I, miss?' she said. 'I beg your pardon, I'm sure, if I was; but I'd just lost my place, miss, and my feelings was hurt. I wasn't answerable for what I said; and seeing I'm here,' she went on, 'though little thinking to wait on you, miss, I hope you won't say anything to get me turned away. I can truly say I'll do my best to give satisfaction.'

Margot looked at the girl: she was neatly if coquettishly dressed; she was rather good-looking; she seemed deft-handed and respectful; she would do well enough.

'So long as you understand that you are to treat Miss Lettie with proper respect,' she said, 'I shall not interfere. But you will kindly remember you are not in France, and that you are my sisters' maid, not their nurse.'

'Yes, miss; certainly, miss, thank you; and I'm sure I'm obliged to you,' said Susan. But outside the door she said: 'I thought my place was gone as soon as I saw her face. Well, I've got round her this time, so I needn't bother. That pride o' yours may have a fall some fine day, young lady, and when it does I should like to be at hand looking on!'

BOOK III.

PRELIMINARIES TO HANGING A DOG.

CHAPTER I.

COMMENTS AFTER CHURCH.

Who marks in church time others' symmetry
Makes all their beauty his deformity.—*G. Herbert.*

ON a certain bright April Sunday, those of the inhabitants of Gorsecombe who had attended the parish church found themselves at the conclusion of the service provided with a more than commonly exciting topic.

Mr. Chadwick and his newly-acquired family had made their first appearance there in public, causing the devotions of too many among the congregation to resemble those of Claudius, King of Denmark.

In the churchyard and on the homeward ways tongues generally were let loose in criticism, curiosity, and speculation.

Mrs. Eddlestone, of Holly Bank, a widow with strong social inclinations and three plain but accomplished daughters, conscientiously refrained from mentioning the subject until the lych-gate was cleared, when, without waiting for Miss Momber to finish her strictures on the folly of keeping the church stove alight so late in the spring, she began forthwith: 'So the Agra House people have come back at last?'

'Oh, yes,' said Miss Momber. 'The governess and the girls arrived on Friday—they had the carriage to meet them and a cart for the luggage, and I suppose the bride and bridegroom must have come last night.'

'I wonder how it was we never heard of it—take care, my dear, or you'll be run over, that new coachman the Hothams have does drive so recklessly, someone really ought to speak to them about it. Came last night, did they? Well, they haven't lost any time in showing themselves. I must say she is rather better than I had expected, and the daughters quite pretty—which makes it more of a pity, you know.'

'Why?' asked Miss Momber bluntly. 'How a pity?'

'Well, I suppose we can't very well call on them—no one has, yet.'

'That was different—he was living alone then. I shall call as soon as they've had time to settle down.'

'Shall you, really?' (Mrs. Eddlestone was surprised, for Miss Momber had the reputation of being extremely exclusive.) 'I wouldn't mind for myself, but, with my girls to consider, I hardly like to risk it. The late man was not recognised by any one, to speak of, and no one seems to know this one. And I must say I thought her manner in church this morning so unbecoming; such affectation to pretend not to know that people were looking at her, and the daughters, too, dressed so conspicuously!'

'I thought they had on very pretty frocks.' (Here Miss Momber glanced at the backs of the three Miss Eddlestons in front, for whom a local dressmaker had too evidently done her very worst.) 'She's rather too fine for him—that's all I see against her.'

'But we don't know who she *was*.'

'Weren't you there when Mr. Liversedge was telling me? Oh no, you had left. She's the widow of a colonel who was killed in India some years ago, and she has a sister who is married to Lord Yaverland.'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Eddlestone. 'Well, I suppose we ought to make them feel as much at home as possible. Gorsecombe will be all the better for a little fresh blood. What day were you thinking of calling? You might look in for me on your way up.'

In the main street of the village were little knots of 'chapel folk' who had been dismissed half an hour before, but still lingered at various doors in the spring sunshine. As Chadwick and his wife, followed by Allen and the three girls (Reggie was away at school), passed up the centre of the road many eyes regarded them.

'I should ha' thought,' said Mrs. Nutkins, a widow who kept a small sweetstuff and fruit shop, 'as he might ha' give the preference to Ebenezer, as was built by his own father, just this first Sunday of all, go where he might afterwards. To think he's never set a foot in the chapel, and his father, poor old gentleman, fillin' his pew reg'lar Sunday after Sunday and always a sovereign in the plate when it come round, and the curtain he had put up in his seat for the drafties, there to this day to testify to him.'

'They do say,' said Mr. Spufford, the serious draper, 'that this one has been away out in India years and years, nigger slave-driving. That may have set him against chapel going—there's no telling.'

'More likely it's this dressed-up fine madam of a wife of his, as thinks it beneath her to worship except it's along of the gentry. Not as he's one of them, by rights. I've heard tell as his father was only a big draper like, up at London, and began wonderful small, no bigger than yourself, Mr. Spufford.'

Mr. Spufford was a stout young man with a puffy white face, mutton-chop whiskers and small eyes. 'Small beginnings may be

wonderfully blest,' he said, with pious hopefulness; 'but it's sad to see a brother forsaking the faith of his forefathers and taking to himself a wife from amongst the Philistines. Not but what there's this much to be thankful for, Mrs. Nutkins, that we're spared from having the latest spring fashions entering into Ebenezer and causing the eyes of our young maidens to offend—look at it that way, ma'am!'

'Ah, you're such a one for making the best o' things, but neither you nor me nor many in Gorsecombe 'll be any the better off for them being here—they'll have everything sent down from London they can, and what custom they give 'll go to church folk over chapel, you see if it don't!'

'Well,' said Mr. Spufford, with a martyr's sigh. 'it will be all made up to us in another world, that is one comfort, Mrs. Nutkins. And now I must be going in to my dinner, if you'll excuse me. Shall I see you at chapel this evening?'

In the kitchen of the Seven Stars set old Mrs. Parkinjea, the landlady, waiting for her granddaughter's return from church. Mrs. Parkinjea was a stout old lady with a brown front and a velvet band across her forehead. At every sound from the back-door she turned in that direction a pair of pale eyes as unspeculative in expression as a pair of glass marbles, for the poor old lady was sightless.

At last there was the noise of the key raising the latch, and steps on the brick floor.

'I thought you was never coming, child; leaving me all this time, and me sitting here in my lonely blindness, thinking of all that was and now is no more. You're never just back from church?'

'Yes, granny,' said Cassandra; 'why, it's only twenty to one now, and we're never out much before the half hour.'

'Then 'tis time that goes slower to me in my ending days. Did the Vicar preach, dear man? Ah, time was I used to love to sit and hear his discourses, when I had my eyesight, but that's finished now—and I'm finished, too, very near! Who was at church, Cassandry?'

'Most everybody that's usually there, granny—and oh! some besides. Mr. Chadwick's new lady up at Agra House—him and her was there, with such beautiful-looking young ladies, dressed I couldn't tell you how nice! And one, the littlest, had the loveliest hair, and the sun shone down on it so bright through the painted winder.'

'So there's a family, and pretty, you say? Dear, dear, and me not able to see it! The old gentleman that's gone used to look in for a chat with me, many's the time. I liked him, I did, though there wasn't many about these parts that had a good word for him, except it was the Ebenezer folk—which he built and erected it out of his own purse, so they had ought to it. I wasn't of his way of thinking, but he was fond of a talk with me. "I have a son out in

Injia somewheres," he'd say to me, when I was a-tellin' him all about your uncle Joe and the trouble I'd had with him. "You'll be thinkin' o' sending for him to be a comfort to your declining years?" I'd say to him. "No, Mrs. Parkinjeer, I shan't," he'd say to me. "I don't rightly know where to send for him, and maybe he wouldn't come if I did. I've treated him harsh in times gone by," he told me, "and it's too late to put it right now; but when I'm took for death he'll find out as I've done what I could to make it up to him." It was along of some marriage his son had made as the old man didn't hold with. And now here's the son in his place with a boy of his own, and married again to a widdier with children of *her* own! And all of 'em in church together this very morning. Well, well! we live in times, Cassandry, we do that! Ah, dear, and this is a world of changes. The young gentleman, now—it'll make a sad difference to him, poor thing, his nose being so put out of j'int, vulgarly speaking; with a new mamma and a family when he'd been everybody. They say his father made a deal on him when they were just here alone together.'

'He looked now to mind it much, from his face,' said Cassandra.

'Didn't he, now? Well, he'll have playmates now and companions, true enough. Postman used to tell me he'd meet him along the lanes, lookin' fit to yawn the head off his shoulders, and no one to go about with but that young Barchard, that isn't fit company for nobody, from all I hear.'

Over the mid-day dinner at the Vicarage, too, the new arrivals were being discussed: 'Mamma,' said Millicent Orme, 'you will call on them now, won't you? I'm sure they're nice!'

Millicent was short, and had none of her brother's good looks, but her plain and rather homely face was saved from being insignificant by its animation. In character she was a warm-hearted girl with a large capacity for enthusiasm, and a strong sense of duty.

'I suppose we shall have to call,' said Mrs. Orme; 'but I do hope, Millicent, you will wait a little before you strike up one of your violent friendships.'

'But I know I shall like that eldest girl,' persisted Millicent; 'she is such a lovely person, she came up the aisle like some kind of splendid princess. Papa, didn't you think she was lovely?'

'Really, Millicent,' Mrs. Orme interposed, 'you seem to forget how your father was engaged this morning! As if he could possibly allow himself to notice such things during the service!'

'After that,' said the Vicar, with a twinkle of humour in his eye, 'I feel a little difficulty in admitting that I *did* notice them all. However, such is the scandalous fact, my dear. The only defence I can offer is that they were a few feet in front of me, and that I have been constructed with eyes of average capacity.'

'And isn't the eldest girl lovely, papa?'

'She—a—struck me as being a very beautiful creature, certainly,' was the reply. 'I trembled for poor Fanshawe's peace of

mind when I heard how he read the first lesson. He's a susceptible youth, even for a curate.'

'I don't at all approve of Mr. Fanshawe's proceedings,' said Mrs. Orme; 'I wish he was a little more serious—he really behaves just like an ordinary young man.'

'He is an ordinary young man,' said the Vicar. 'Surely, my dear, you don't consider that the average curate is hedged by any divinity in particular? Fanshawe's divinity would make rather a scrappy hedge, I'm afraid. Some might say the same of his Vicar's, for that matter.' And the Rev. Cyprian gave a sigh, half comic, half genuine.

He was a tall, portly man, very handsome still, with silvered hair, which contrasted well with his strong dark eyebrows and clear roseate complexion. He was a little conscious sometimes of not fulfilling the highest ideal of the priestly character, and he was apt to shock some of his parishioners by a manner which was unparsonical, not to say secular. He was clever, and had been cleverer still, indolent and easy-going, with a sense of humour that was occasionally inconvenient. His wife, who was almost exempted from this complaint, was a little exercised at times by his lapses from clerical decorum, though she generally abstained from any direct reproof, preferring to convey it by implication.

In appearance she was a bright-eyed anxious little woman, who had worried away any good looks she had originally possessed.

'I'm sure you preach beautiful sermons, Cyprian,' she said; 'you know how much all the people like them—they go straight home to them, they always say,'

'It must be down their throats then,' said the Vicar. 'I feel very much as if I were preaching to a congregation of fishes sometimes.'

'But about this new Mrs. Chadwick, mamma?' said Millicent. 'Don't you think this marriage will be an excellent thing? I do. I never saw anyone so changed as that son of Mr. Chadwick's. He used to look so dull and heavy and uninterested, and now, in church this morning, he seemed quite bright and happy. It made me like him ever so much better, because some only sons would have taken their father's marriage so very differently.'

'So you're making *him* out a phoenix, too, Millicent, eh?' interrupted the Vicar.

'Only in that. I used to dislike him very much, and pitied poor Nugent for having to go abroad with him; but I've got to like him better lately. When you think how little education he has had, he might be so much worse than he is!'

'He might be a little more picturesque with advantage,' said her father lazily. 'He's one of those young fellows who always strike one as incomplete without a pen behind his ear. Capital ear for a pen!'

'I think you are rather unkind, papa!'

'It was quite unintentional, my dear,' said the Vicar. 'I

assure you I have the highest respect for commerce and everybody connected with it. All I meant was that a boyhood passed in purely mechanical office-work is not, perhaps, the ideal preparation for the life of a country gentleman, which I should say was undeniable.'

'Are you sure that he was a clerk, papa?'

The Vicar chuckled: 'No, Millie, I am not. I have sometimes had a dark suspicion that he was nearer the rank of office-boy. As a matter of fact, I don't know what he was; at all events it's not of vital importance. He is an addition, numerically, at all events, to Gorsecombe society now. His father isn't a bad fellow in his own way. Sends me a cheque like a man when I appeal for any of my funds. I should say those young ladies will find him a very liberal stepfather, if they go the right way to manage him.'

In the long oak drawing-room at Hawleigh Court that afternoon, the Chadwick marriage was honoured by being made the subject of conversation.

One or two privileged neighbours had dropped in about five o'clock; Mr. Liversedge being among them. The long drawing-room was a very inviting place, particularly just now. The low ceiling with its groining and stalactite-like bosses was almost lost in shadow, and through the latticed and mullioned windows the formal yews, box-trees, and urns on the terrace took the colours of old tapestry against the delicate pink and primrose hues of a spring sunset.

Joceline Hotham—a sunny-faced, yellow-haired girl, who just missed being pretty—was presiding at the small tea-table; Lady Adela, her mother, a large, handsome, rather stupid-looking woman, occupied a couch near the fire, in which situation she could join in the conversation when she felt disposed, and shut her eyes in luxurious wakefulness in the interim.

'Tea?' Miss Hotham was saying to Mr. Liversedge. 'I haven't given you any cream. Why weren't you at your parish church this morning, please?'

'Domestic anxiety?' he explained hypocritically; 'work of necessity. You see, one of my sister's canary birds wasn't at all the thing this morning, not at all the thing, and so I stayed at home to keep it company—fact, Miss Hotham, I assure you!'

'If you are a heathen, you need not make a joke of it—it's serious. And to-day you really missed something. All the good people of Gorsecombe exciting themselves tremendously—and what do you suppose about? Just because that planter man who has the house with the Indian name just above the village happened to bring his new wife and family to church for the first time. But you ought to have been there.'

'Yes, I see now that I have grossly neglected my duties. I must go and pay my respects to her some time—charming woman!'

'Then you have seen her?' said Lady Adela.

'Oh! I know her—know her well. Knew her first husband,

the Colonel, out in India; fine fellow he was, too. Left her very fairly off, but she must needs go and burn her fingers with stocks and shares and muddle most of it away. But for that, she'd never have looked at this man.'

'What's wrong with the man—is he an acquaintance of yours, too?' asked Lady Adela.

'He was in my district at one time, and I came across him occasionally. Didn't like him. Some of the planters out there were pleasant fellows enough, but *they* couldn't stand him—he put their backs up when he first came, by siding with the missionaries.'

'A very right and proper thing to do in *my* opinion!' said the lady.

'Ah, but that didn't last long, he soon quarrelled with them, and then he was out in the cold. He seemed to change his character altogether after he'd been out a little while; became a reckless, violent, overbearing sort of fellow who cared for nobody, went regularly to the bad for a time—quite a scandal he caused out there. Now he's come into this fortune he's reformed, sown his wild oats (or his wild indigo) and turned respectable.'

'And how did this new wife of his come to marry him?'

'Ah, I can tell you the whole story, as it happens, for I had the honour of bringing it about. If she hadn't known me and been perfectly sure it was all right about the money, she wouldn't have risked it. It was at Trouville—we were all at the same hotel there—and after what I told her, I saw she was trying to catch either the son for her daughter, or the father for herself; it was much the same to her. And would you believe it, Lady Adela, that man, who owes his domestic felicity to me, is actually huffy still about some ridiculous ryots I found shut up in his factory and had to wig him for?'

'Who did you say *she* was?' inquired Lady Adela.

'She was a Mrs. Chevening.'

'Then that explains it!' cried Miss Hotham, starting up excitedly with a sparkle in her blue eyes. 'I was wondering all through the sermon where it was I had seen that eldest girl's face before. She was at school with me. I used to admire her so awfully—all the girls did—but she's improved since then. Mother, couldn't you drive over there some day and take me? I should so like to see her again!'

'I see no reason for calling there at all,' said Lady Adela. 'I don't approve of such marriages, and I shall certainly not go out of my way to countenance them.'

'And mayn't I ride over—just to see her?'

'Not on any account, Joceline; you will probably meet her somewhere, and if you like to recognise her, of course you may. Other people may do as they please about calling, but I shall be very careful not to set the example myself.'

And so, at Hawleigh at least, it was settled that the Chadwicks were not to be taken up—a result to which Mr. Liversedge's small

talk had largely contributed; though, to balance this, he had in other quarters supplied information which decided the lesser lights of Gorsecombe society that the new mistress of Agra House was not a person they could afford to turn their backs upon.

To return to the subjects of all these conversations, whom we left walking home through the village in happy ignorance of the discussion their appearance had provoked.

'Well, Selina,' said Chadwick grimly, 'we've got *that* over; they'll know us next Sunday.'

'I thought you had lived in this place some months,' said Mrs. Chadwick, in rather a chagrined tone.

'So I have, off and on,' he replied. 'Why?'

'Only,' she said, 'that you don't seem to know any of the people yet.'

'Didn't you see little Prisk, the chemist, come up and speak to me as we went out?' he asked; 'and Jobson, the butcher, touched his hat in the churchyard.'

'The chemist! the butcher!' she repeated with a touch of contempt; 'I meant any of the *good* people. Who were the family who sat in the big pew next to the chancel?'

'Oh, I know *them*, of course—the Hothams, of Hawleigh, a few miles from here; heavy swells, I can tell you. He's a baronet, and she was an earl's daughter.'

'You know them; then why didn't they come and speak to you?'

'I didn't mean know them in that way. I know who they *are*, that's all. You didn't think they'd condescend to take any notice of *me*, did you? Why, they're *county* people!' And he laughed at so extravagant an idea.

'No doubt I was very absurd,' said his wife, and bit her lips. Perhaps she had never realised till then the descent she had made; a horrible fear came upon her that she might find herself condemned, after all, to a position outside the pale of this dull little village, or, worse still, visited by the least considerable of the inhabitants as a mark of condescension. Was not even the state of aristocratic pauperism in a shabby old house in a London suburb, where she at least enjoyed a certain amount of consideration, better than such a lot as this? Why had she shut her eyes to such a possibility? Why had she persuaded herself that her poverty was so intolerable, and that she could both escape it by this marriage and retain all the social advantages that she had always valued?

She walked on by the side of the husband whose companionship became every day a greater burden to her. Was his to be the sole society she could expect henceforward? She shivered at the thought. After all, she reflected this was not a very probable contingency; county society might be exclusive, but in these days even county society would hardly consider it a disqualification to have been an indigo-planter—probably a fair proportion of their younger sons were out tea-planting or cattle-ranching now. If the indigo

had been all—and then she glanced aside at her husband, with his plebeian features burnt an indelible red by Indian suns, and rendered even less distinguished than they might be from the shape and cut of his patchy beard. In his white hat with the black band, his aggressive white waistcoat, his frock coat with the large swinging skirts, he seemed out of place in a village. She could not wonder if local magnates were to hold aloof, and yet—no, she would not despair; it was too early to do that at present, and she remembered the movement of startled involuntary admiration of the congregation as her children passed down the aisle. It was only a question of waiting—she must conquer in the end.

‘Hennie, dear,’ said Ida to Miss Henderson, as they walked a few paces behind, ‘I think I shall love going to church here; shan’t you?’ For Miss Henderson had been induced to remain for the present at an increased salary, and Ida was overcome with gratitude for such devoted attachment.

Miss Henderson sighed; ‘We shall at all events be able to look forward to one or two sweet peaceful hours in each week, when the strain will be relaxed for a time; yes, Ida, no one can rob us of that!’

No one, it is true, had shown any intention of wishing to do so, but that trifling fact did not in Ida’s eyes affect the beauty of the sentiment.

‘How brave you are, Hennie; I wonder what I *should* do without you!’

‘Poor child! it is harder for you than any of them; you are such a sensitive darling. They may part us yet—but there, we won’t meet troubles half way. It is a dear church, and what a nice voice that curate had who read the first lesson!’

‘Yes; he had nice eyes, too, Hennie, didn’t you think? and he read beautifully, if he hadn’t lost the place so often.’

And they continued the conversation in a confidential tone, perhaps from a fear lest it might reach Margot’s ears, for Miss Chevening was apt to be rather contemptuous of this kind of talk.

They were safe enough, however, for she was at a considerable distance in the rear with Lettice and Allen.

‘Do you know, Margot,’ said Lettice, ‘I don’t think they’re at all polite people in this village—they stared so *dreadfully*!’

‘You should have stared at them back,’ said Allen.

‘Then I should have been rude, too. I did stare at the monuments, though. Such a lot of Hothams, Margot, did you notice?’

Margot came out of her reverie with a start. ‘The Hothams! What do you know about the Hothams, Lettice?’

‘Nothing—they seemed to be mostly dead, and they had all the biggest tablets, that’s all!’

‘Oh, are they though?’ said Allen; ‘that was Sir Everard and Lady Adela, and their daughters, in that pew opposite—the big square one.’

'I should have thought they'd be in black—with so many deaths in the family,' said Lettice. 'Oh, look, Margot! there they are in the carriage—it's a nicer one than Aunt Gwendolen's. Why don't you look, Margot? You're turning your head the other way!'

'You're forgetting your own rule about it being rude to stare, darling,' said Margot, with a faint smile.

'These swells are used to it,' said Allen; 'they come out to be stared at—don't you know that?'

'You forget,' she said, with a fine irony. 'How should I know what such people are like?'

'Well, I don't know much about 'em myself,' he confessed.

'Then, if I were you, I don't think I should talk about them.'

'You do come down on a chap,' he said, laughing. 'I can't open my mouth.'

'*That's* a story!' said Lettice, looking up at him critically; 'you are opening it now—quite wide.'

'Little girls should be seen and not heard,' he said.

'Great boys,' retorted Lettice, 'shouldn't be heard or seen—when they're like you. Margot and I want to talk, don't we dear? We don't want *you*.'

'Oh, come,' he said, 'you're not going to make me walk by myself? I didn't begin it!'

Lettice had a great idea of fairness. 'I think I *did* begin it perhaps,' she admitted. 'I suppose you can't help laughing like that. I don't mind your staying, if Margot doesn't.'

'I may walk with you, Margot; you've no objection, have you?'

Margot was in an absent mood again. 'Oh, no,' she said, recalling her thoughts with an effort, 'of course you can walk with us if you want to—why not?'

Her thoughts were a little bitter just then; she had recognised Joceline Hotham in church, and had believed that, in spite of the calm stare her old schoolfellow had given her, the recognition was mutual. Under other circumstances she would not have cared; as it was, she was convinced that it was on account of her mother's change of name that Joceline did not come forward to speak to her, though she forgot that she had been careful to avoid giving her the opportunity. She felt degraded in her own estimation, and shrank with an exaggerated unwillingness from facing one who had known her in the days when she had been serenely conscious of being the daughter of a gallant and distinguished officer, with no relations in the world of whom she had reason to be anything but proud. That was her father, now—the coarsely-made, unpolished man walking up the street ahead. This mean-looking youth at her side was her brother! How could she present them to Joceline? 'It's not snobbish,' she thought, 'to be ashamed, for how can I be anything else?'

CHAPTER II.

ATTEMPTS TO MANUFACTURE A SILK PURSE.

If doughty deeds my lady please,
 Right soon I'll mount my steed;
 And strong his arm, and fast his seat
 That bears frae me the meed.

Graham of Gartmore.

Mrs. CHADWICK's most dismal anticipations were not realised. Before she had been long at Gorsecombe, not only had the principal residents either called or left cards, but she had been recognised by more than one of the county families in the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Orme and Millicent were the first to set the example, as in duty bound. Mrs. Orme, who, as some clergymen's wives will, considered the formal recognition of the Vicarage no ordinary mark of distinction in any case, and in this, a favour denoting some liberality of views, was promptly made aware that the lady of Agra House had no intention of being patronised.

She was impressed by the signs of taste and well-directed wealth in the room she was shown into: she had expected the interior to be crude and barbaric, in harmony with the pompous ugliness without. Mrs. Chadwick's manner, too, made her feel herself almost provincial; involuntarily she found herself taking far more pains to establish an intimacy than she had ever intended to do on a first acquaintance.

Millicent, left to make overtures of friendship to Miss Chevening, thought her even more beautiful than she had on that first Sunday. How perfectly she was dressed, in that dark, close-fitting blue gown, with the loose folds of cool creamy stuff at her waist, and how lovely her hands were as they lay in her lap or hovered over the cups! 'Like the hands of that portrait of Romney's at Hawleigh Court,' thought Millicent, admiring her quite unreservedly and disinterestedly, as some girls—though by no means all—are capable of admiring beauty in their own sex.

'I hope,' she began, a little timidly, 'you begin to like Gorsecombe a little; we think it so pleasant.'

('Mr. Orme's sister,' Margot was thinking; 'not at all like him.') 'It is a pretty village,' she said, 'but of course we don't know any of the people yet.'

'Would you like to know some of them?' said Millicent, wondering whether she ought to be so eager; 'because—they will call, of course—but—but if you would come to the Vicarage next Saturday you would meet some. Perhaps you don't care for tennis, though?'

'Oh, but I do,' said Margot; 'I should like to come, very much. I suppose you are great players?'

'I'm not much use at it, but my brother Nugent is thought rather good, I believe.'

'I think I have met your brother at Trouville,' said Margot; 'he was there last autumn, was he not?'

'Yes; how curious that you should have met him; I'm so glad!' cried Millicent, and feared she had been too gushing; she was wondering what Miss Chevening had thought of her brother, and whether he had been able to help falling in love with her. 'I should, if I were he,' she told herself.

The hazel eyes betrayed nothing more than a friendly interest as Miss Chevening asked, 'Is he staying with you now?'

'Oh, no, poor boy, he is up in town working hard—he so seldom gets away from his chambers; he may take a few days at Whitsuntide. I am very proud of my brother,' added Millicent.

At this moment the door opened roughly and a head was thrust in. 'I say, Margot,' said Allen's voice, 'have you seen——' and then he turned red. 'Oh, I wasn't aware you had company—excuse me!' And the door shut again.

'I can quite understand your feelings, Miss Orme,' said Margot, as Allen vanished. 'That was my stepbrother; he always has that quiet, distinguished manner.'

She looked so innocently calm as she made this remark, that Millicent was almost afraid to accept it as ironical. 'I know him a little,' she said; 'he used to come to the Vicarage now and then. He found everything a little strange at first, and I'm afraid we made him feel rather shy. I am sorry—he is very good-natured.'

'You are very good-natured,' said Margot, a little ashamed of herself. 'I wish I could be. I ought not to have spoken like that, but I can't help it always. You see,' she added, 'I am showing the worst of myself.'

'If *that* is your worst!' protested Millicent, 'I—I—am not much afraid. And, oh, I should like to have you for a friend so much—if you will let me?'

There was an enthusiastic admiration in her eyes which quite won Miss Chevening's already yielding heart. 'I shall be very glad,' she said simply. 'I have no friends here.' And Millicent went back to the Vicarage enraptured with her new friend and devoted to her service heart and soul.

Mrs. Eddlestone called, too, having stolen à marche upon Miss Momber; she appeared one afternoon with her three daughters. 'We're such near neighbours,' she began in her high voice, 'I've been saying to my girls every day, "Now we really *must* go over and call on the Chadwicks!" but there are so many things to do in the country, and this is absolutely the first opportunity we've had. And how do you like Gorsecombe? We're very cheery people here, I can assure you. These are my girls—Dottie, Pussie, and Fay—young people, you see, like your own, and ready for anything in the way of amusement. I'm very often told that Gorsecombe would go *quite* to sleep if Holly Bank were to let, and there really is a

little truth in it—we do contrive to keep our spirits up. I sometimes really have to beg for a little peace and quietness myself!’

The Eddlestone girls were rather unfortunate instances of the inconveniences of retaining a superannuated pet name, Pussy being thin with large extremities, Dottie tall and gaunt, and Fay alone plump. They all three took possession of Margot, and overwhelmed her with questions and descriptions, without requiring her to take any active part in the conversation, in which they gave evidence of strong animal spirits and the heartiest mutual admiration. ‘Do you recite, dear Miss Chevening? I hope you do. No? really! then you must come and hear Fay; some people say they like her better than Clifford Harrison, and she never even *heard* him!’

‘You musn’t believe all Pussie says, dear Miss Chevening,’ said Fay. ‘I know I recite abominably—now, Pussie is a poet. Mr. Callembores took a piece of hers for Tennyson once. Pussie’s the genius of the family, though Dottie is a born artist: she sketches so quickly—such facility, you know, and she never had any lessons!’

‘I’m sure you paint,’ said Dottie. ‘I shall be ashamed to let you see my daubs; but you must come out sketching with me as soon as it gets warmer.’

‘Now,’ said Fay, ‘do tell me whom you know as yet, and we’ll tell you what everybody’s like. Have the Callembores called? They’re *going* to, I know. He’s considered so amusing, no one ever gives a dinner-party without asking them: as for her, she sits and smiles, but she doesn’t sparkle. Not like Mrs. Megginson; she’s great fun, with a husband just like a dissipated white mouse. Then there’s the Admiral—do you know the dear Admiral? You must know the Admiral—such a delightful, noisy old love! And Mr. Powles, haven’t you noticed Mr. Powles? with a face like a Death’s head—when he wears a white tie, it looks exactly like the cross-bones,’ and so on, and so on, until the roll of residents was exhausted.

‘At all events,’ said Margot, with a weary little shrug, when they had gone, ‘we shall not be dull. Do they *ever* leave off talking, I wonder?’

‘They are a little overpowering, certainly,’ said her mother, ‘but they will be useful people to know.’

And through Holly Bank and the Vicarage, and visits arising from meetings at these places, the Chadwicks gradually became admitted into Gorsecombe society, though Chadwick was rather tolerated on his wife’s account than welcomed on his own.

He did not seem to be aware of this, however. These Gorsecombe people were beginning to find out, he thought, that he was worth cultivating; he could get along without them now, but if they liked to be civil to him, why, he was willing to meet them half way. So he came into the drawing-room at times when callers were there and did his best to be agreeable, though his efforts made his wife shiver occasionally; he drove with her to return visits, and was visibly elated by invitations to dinner,

There was one point on which he occasionally showed himself a little intractable: he was disposed to resent the way in which his son was eclipsed by his step-daughters. 'Why do they leave Allen out of their invites?' he would say to his wife; 'there's little notes always coming in from the Vicarage or Holly Bank and such places, asking will Margot, or Margot and Ida, or all three and the governess, come in for lawn tennis, or afternoon tea, or what not—but I never hear of their asking Allen. What's he done to be left out?'

'Why, my dear Joshua, the truth is Allen is just a little inclined to keep himself in the background—he doesn't seem quite at home with the people here, and they conclude, of course, that he would prefer not to be asked.'

'He must come out of the background, then,' said his father; 'he's a good lad enough, he only wants a little encouragement to hold his own with the best of them.'

'I'm afraid,' sighed Mrs. Chadwick, 'he doesn't do himself quite justice—that unfortunate manner of his!'

'What's wrong with his manner? I don't see much amiss with it myself. Shy? All young fellows who are not puppies *are* shy. You can't expect a young fellow brought up as he's been to take to this sort of life all at once. If your girls chose, they could soon put him in the way of behaving like other people—they don't find any difficulty in it themselves, apparently.'

'They have always been considered to have rather good manners,' said Mrs. Chadwick. 'It is not quite a new experience for them, you see.'

'Well,' concluded Chadwick, 'I must give him a talking to, that's all; I can't have my son left out in the cold. He must do like other young fellows in his position.'

But if Allen was left unnoticed by Gorsecombe, he was contented enough; he was under the same roof with Margot, he saw her every day, and could even address her by her Christian name without fearing a rebuke. She was not ungracious to him, too, in her careless fashion; habit was doing its usual work, and she submitted to the necessity of listening and replying to his remarks without open impatience, even though her inward repulsion was as deep as ever, and she was not really more reconciled to being so nearly related to one at whom she even avoided looking unless absolutely compelled.

And though Ida took far less trouble to hide her feelings, and Allen's sentiments for her were not cordial, he had succeeded at last in recommending himself to Lettice's favour. Yarrow had acted as the mediator between them. 'It's funny that Margot's dog should be so fond of you,' she told him candidly, and then added with a gleam of tact, 'at least, I mean because he doesn't generally make friends with anybody all at once, you know; but if he likes you, I suppose *I* must.'

It was rather a patronising form of liking, it must be confessed,

such as Lettice might have bestowed upon a gardener's boy, or a stable-help, but Allen was not particular.

He felt his own inferiority deeply, in spite of spasmodic and rather pathetic attempts to assert himself. Next to Margot—who seemed to him a being infinitely far removed and to be worshipped in secret under pain of arousing her displeasure—this little sister of hers held the next place in his heart, with her quaint alternations of dignity and fun, and her pretty chatter like the trilling of some voluble small bird. He did her bidding humbly, although he ventured to adopt a more familiar and brotherly manner towards her, and Lettice occasionally criticised his shortcomings with a freedom which he took in perfect good part. 'I suppose,' she said to him meditatively one day, when he was assisting her in some gardening operations, 'you never had any governess when you were little?'

'Me?' said Allen, with his spluttering laugh, 'not much; why?'

'Only because—you won't mind my telling you, will you?—she would have taught you how to eat differently. You do make—well, *rather* a noise, you know, and then you eat so very fast. I had to be told how myself!' she added considerably.

'I never thought how I eat before. I say, Lettie, does—does Margot ever say anything about it?'

'Margot?—oh look, isn't that one of those horrid little green atheists on that stalk? No, it's too early for them yet, isn't it?—No, Margot doesn't; mother does sometimes, so I thought I'd speak to you myself. I was sure it was only because you didn't *know*—there, that's enough water for those things! I'll race you to the monkey-tree!'

Unfortunately the result of these well-meant monitions was only to make him more self-conscious at meals than ever; his step-mother's expression was very eloquent at times, but she made no remark until one day, when some *gaucherie* of his at luncheon had provoked even his father, whose watchfulness had been aroused by private complaints, to make a comment. 'I did not like to speak before,' she said, 'but really, with every disposition to make allowances, I think we might expect *some* regard to be shown to the ordinary rules of behaviour. It isn't much to ask from you, Allen!'

'I—I did it without thinking,' he said. 'I am sure I ask your pardon.'

Mrs. Chevening gave a resigned little sigh; Margot kept her eyes on the table, and Lettice alone looked at the culprit with serious eyes, and her cheeks sympathetically flushed.

'If you can't understand that you're sitting at a gentleman's table,' said his father, 'the best thing you can do is to leave it.'

His father had never before seen anything amiss with his manners, thought Allen, as he rose with a vague impression that it was required of him. 'Don't send him away this time,' pleaded Lettice, 'he does mean to behave nicely!'

'I don't want him to go so long as he minds his manners,' said

Chadwick gruffly; 'sit down, Allen, and don't make a fool of yourself—d'ye hear?'

He sat down with a fiery face and a swelling of his heart. He felt disgraced in Margot's eyes as she sat there with her air of being aloof from it all; even Lettice's intercession had hurt him, somehow, though he was grateful for her good intentions.

This incident, trivial as it was, had the effect of opening Chadwick's eyes more clearly to his son's defects. His wife was careful to keep them before him without appearing to show more than a motherly solicitude, and they began to worry him at last. Still the fatherly instinct within him, which had slumbered so many years and had been quickened by his son's admiring and dutiful attitude on their first acquaintance, made him fertile in excuses and plans.

'People down here won't trouble about his being a bit rough, he would say; 'and he'll soon get over that, with a little looking after. He'll do very well if he takes to sport, and he's young enough still to make himself good at that sort of thing. I must see that he keeps up his riding.'

And one day at breakfast he said suddenly: 'I suppose you feel pretty comfortable in the saddle now, eh, Allen?'

'I haven't ridden since we've all been here together,' said Allen.

'I know that; I meant to ride with you myself, but I've had other things to think about; but when you *did* ride, you were all right, eh?'

'Pretty well,' said Allen, conscious of some exaggeration, even in this.

'Ah, you can't ride the new carriage horses, you know, and I want my own cob myself, so I shall have to see about getting a horse for you—well, can't you *say* something?'

'Thanks, father.'

'And you must learn to stick on it. I want you to follow the hounds next season. I'm too old to take to it myself, so there's more reason you should do it for me—that's the way *you'll* have to make your friends.'

Allen heard with a certain pleasurable excitement; he had ridden very seldom, and the sober old carriage-horse that carried him had spared him any unpleasant experiences. He thought it would be a fine thing to have a horse of his own and hunt when the winter came, as if he had been a country gentleman all his life—perhaps Margot would look on him then with greater respect!

Chadwick lost no time in fulfilling his promise by going up to Tattersall's and selecting a horse—a handsome, powerful beast with excellent manners, which could be trusted to carry Allen. After trying it himself he rode out daily with Allen, who did his best to perfect his horsemanship. Unfortunately, he might conceivably have had a better riding-master; for, though Chadwick had of necessity ridden constantly in India, and had a firm enough seat, he found it difficult to communicate his method, except by advising

his son to stick on and not let his horse get the better of him—rules which, after all, rather beg the question at issue.

However, the new horse went well enough, and he was not observant enough to see that Allen had no real notion of controlling him, and was only fortified by his father's presence. 'Plenty of action!' Chadwick would say complacently; 'you're getting on terms with him already, and there are not many young fellows about here better mounted, I can tell you—cost me a pretty penny, Hussar did. Steady, horse. Lost your stirrups, eh? that's nothing—you must learn to do without 'em, you'll shake down right enough.'

In a somewhat different sense, Allen thought this only too probable; but in his anxiety to satisfy his father he did not dare to betray by words how extremely precarious he felt his tenure of the saddle to be, and, thanks to the forbearance of Hussar, who was quite aware that he was under close supervision, he avoided any actual mischance.

And Chadwick, naturally anxious to feel proud of his son, did not need much encouragement to make him so; he began to make little half-jocular, half-boasting allusions to Allen's riding to persons he happened to be talking with. 'Oh,' he would say, 'there aren't many places round here we don't know by this time, my son and I. We ride a good deal—every day, wet or fine. It's not so much on my own account as his, the young rascal—getting quite the jockey, ha, ha!' Or he would say to some member of the hunt after dinner: 'No, I shan't come out myself next autumn; never went in for pig-sticking or polo or a run after jackal out in Bengal, had too much to do—all that has come in since my time. But there's my son, he'll represent me; and, between ourselves, I don't fancy I shall be ashamed of him across country by the time he's had a little more practice.' And his hearer, if he had chanced to observe Allen on horseback, would do his best to control his countenance and reply with a civil hope that they would see young Mr. Chadwick in the hunting-field before very long.

It flattered the father's vanity to dwell upon this event, which he chose to consider as in the near future.

'I've been telling Topham'—(Topham was the coachman)—he said one day, 'that it's time he put up a hurdle or two in the paddock and saw you take Hussar over them—do you more good than anything, you know, a few falls will. But Topham thinks we had better wait till the ground's a bit softer again. This hard, dry spell can't last long, unless I've forgotten what an English May is like.'

Allen was relieved at any postponement, and as his father was much occupied soon after with business affairs and Topham by no means cared to be responsible for his young master's safety across hurdles, the matter was allowed to drop. One morning, when the stable-boy brought round the horses as usual, and Allen stood on the steps waiting for his father, Chadwick called to him from the window of his study.

'I can't go out this morning, my boy, too much to attend to, so you must manage on Hussar alone for to-day.'

'Mayn't I have Topham, or the boy, to go with me?'

'No, you mayn't; your mother wants the carriage after lunch, and the boy's got his own work. You must learn to get on by yourself; gives you confidence. There, tumble up, and be off—you'll be all right.'

Allen did not dare to protest. He mounted, and Hussar went off down the drive with one or two puzzled glances behind for the cob, which he seemed to miss.

Of course the horse was not long in realising the situation, and in taking advantage of it. He swung leisurely along, with an offensive assumption of not being obliged to hurry; he stopped and looked over gates with new-born interest in scenery, and showed an eccentric preference for the side-path; he pricked his ears in mock nervousness at every striking object in the road, and broke into capricious trots or sidelong ambles; it was creditable to him that he did not do much more than this, but, as it was, he gave Allen quite enough trouble. It was a warm day, and he felt helpless and hot and miserable, at the mercy of this headstrong beast. But for his fear of his father, he would gladly have turned his head homeward; but on he jogged jerkily over the road, which steamed and glittered under a May sun. He could almost have wished himself back in the dingy city office again, as he was that time last year; but no, that was the same as wishing that Margot and Lettice, and this new, luxurious, strangely troubling existence could be blotted out. He did not mean that, of course. He must keep up his pluck; Margot liked a chap to have a good pluck, he wasn't going to own himself a coward before her; and he hit Hussar across the shoulders and jerked the curb, which caused the animal to toss his head and snort indignantly. At that moment a farmer's cart turned sharp round the corner with something jingling under the seat, and Hussar, his nerves really fretted at last, broke into a canter which became a gallop, though not at any time an absolute bolt. Fortunately he was not difficult to sit at any pace, or poor Allen would soon have been in the road; but he had lost all control over him, and was just giving himself up for lost, when the horse, having had enough of it, slackened of his own accord, until he returned to his former fidgety walk.

Considerably exhausted and demoralised by all this, Allen sat limply in his saddle with a dismal conviction that with one more such escapade on Hussar's part they would part company, and it would take little enough to startle him now. He could not make up his mind to dismount, especially as Hussar would not stand, and so he went on under the branching elms, through whose budding branches the sun struck in iridescent rays which seemed to irritate Hussar still further.

Suddenly, at another turn of the road, he saw a figure he knew approaching.

'Bob,' he called, 'Bob Barchard!'

It was a young fellow about his own age, with sandy hair and a freckled white face, with something at once impudent and cunning in the small sunken eyes. As he heard himself called, he quickened his step and came up. 'So, then, you are on yer cockhorse!' he said with a cool smile; 'it's fine t^o be you!'

'Is it?' said Allen, with an oath. 'I've had a nice business of it with this beast, I can tell you, Bob; he's run away with me once.'

'I thought it was queer-like, you stopping to speak to such as me,' said Bob, 'you've got among such fine folk now—but that accounts for it. Fact is,' he said, looking at the horse, 'you ain't up to managing a horse like that; he's a beauty, he is, but you never ought to come out alone on him. Why, I'd make that horse go as quiet!'

'I wish you were on him instead of me, then,' said Allen. 'Can you ride, Bob?'

'Me ride?' said Bob, 'why, I've rode since I was that high. They let me exercise the animals up at Lane's farm when they're short of men—there ain't anything I'd mind getting on?'

'Would you like to try Hussar for a bit?' suggested Allen, with a sudden desperate hope. Barchard laughed in his face. 'We're uncommon good-natured this morning,' he said, 'you're sure you can spare him? No, thank 'ee, I won't deprive you!'

'Bob,' said Allen, 'this brute 'll have me off, I know he will, Do me a good turn, and lead him back till we get near the village.'

'Can't be bothered leading a horse,' said Bob; 'it was ride him just now, I thought.'

'Ride him back, then—I can walk.'

Bob grinned. 'You've been flustering him a bit,' he said, 'he'll take some riding, the way he is—likely he'll try it on with me. Howsoever, I'll oblige you, if I risk my own neck doing it. We were pals once!'

Bob's indifference had been only feigned; he would have given one of his fingers to be in the saddle on that mettlesome hunter, and only his inbred shrewdness had kept him from closing with the offer at once. He was the son of a local decorator and plumber, a well-to-do man who allowed him to do much as he liked, and Bob's reputation in Gorsecombe and the surrounding villages was none of the best. He was about Allen's age, but the rustic youth was more than a match for the other in knowledge of the world, and during the months in which Allen had been left alone at Agra House, had managed to make his acquaintance, and obtain a certain ascendancy over him.

And the next moment he was on Hussar, and Allen, in whom an immense relief was struggling with a certain shame, was walking along the road at his side. 'Now, you see how he goes with me,' said young Barchard; 'I'll come back.' And, striking his heel against Hussar's side, he cantered off. How easy it looked,

thought poor dismounted Allen, why couldn't *he* make the horse obey him like that? For Bob had not exaggerated; he had a fair seat, and firm if not very light hands, which Hussar appreciated the more by contrast.

Presently he came back at a gallop, and reined up with a lurking grin on his face. 'Here's a go,' he said, 'I saw your father's carriage coming along—oh, they ain't near yet. I thought I'd better give you the friendly tip?'

Allen turned pale. 'Did they see you?' he said. 'Here, Bob, I must get on again—there's no help for it.' But Bob did not mean to yield possession just yet. 'No time for that!' he said. 'We're about the same size and colour, I reckon—chuck me that cap of yours and take mine—quick! they'll be round the bend—that's it; now you slip down by the bridge, and lay low till they're by, and I'll trot on smart and turn my head t'other way—they won't notice!'

The road made a sharp bend to the left just there, crossing a bridge over the railway; to the right was a lane as wide as the road which sloped down to the level of the line. Bob was off on Hussar as he spoke, and Allen had no choice but to follow his advice: he got behind the brick parapet and waited with a beating heart. He was ashamed of his weakness; and yet, as he told himself sullenly, it was all very well—was it his fault that he could not manage the horse? Was he bound to let his neck be broken, as it might have been, but for Bob? Only what would be thought of him, if it was known? Perhaps, even now, his step-mother was stopping the carriage, misled by appearances! What a time the wheels were in coming!—at last, that was the carriage! and from the upper level he heard the trot of horses and the soft splutter of wheels on the muddy road pass and die away in the distance towards Closeborough—the danger was past!

He came out and soon rejoined Barchard. 'All right,' he heard him shout, 'I went by in a flash like, and shoved the cap well down over my eyes—they never spotted 'twarn't you, I'll go bail!'

And so they went on till they were near the gates, 'I've taken the freshness out of him for you,' said the disinterested Bob, 'you'll be equal to sitting him up the drive. You'd never ha' got him home without you'd met me. If you're going out this way again, you'd better let me know.'

'I shan't go out this way again, if I know it!' said Allen, and he meant it.

'Why,' said his father, as he met him on his return, 'you are late, old boy! I began to think something was the matter; but then, I might have known you could be trusted to look after yourself. Why, you've had a good hard ride, I can see. Famous! Did you meet the carriage? Your mother had lunch early and drove over to Closeborough.'

'I know,' said Allen, 'they passed us.'

‘And you’ve had a good tittup, eh?’

‘Yes,’ said the miserable Allen, ‘I’ve had a good tittup.’

If he could but have owned the real truth—but he was afraid; next time his father would go out with him, Hussar would behave better, he could never again place himself in such a predicament; why should he expose himself unnecessarily? It was so easy to say nothing, and make good resolutions for the future.

CHAPTER III.

CARE AND THE HORSEMAN.

He knows a baseness in his blood
At such strange war with something good;
He cannot do the thing he would!

The Two Voices

It was the evening of the day which witnessed Allen’s humiliating experience on Hussar, and, after lingering as long over dressing as he could—for he shrank from meeting his step-mother, who might for all he could tell have seen through Bob’s disguise—he entered the drawing-room. He was always a little awed on these occasions; the softened light, the delicate fragrance of the azaleas, the luxury of the room were still new and strange to him, and produced a certain sense of being an intruder—the old painful feeling of inferiority to the others, who seemed to harmonise so well with their surroundings. They were all there: Ida and Miss Henderson playing ‘Reversi’ under the lamp by one of the windows; Margot acting as consulting milliner to Lettice, who was dressing a doll; Mrs. Chadwick in a low chair by the fire-place, where Chadwick stood in expansive ungainliness. ‘Come in,’ he cried with his great harsh laugh; ‘don’t stand there, looking like a dog in a chapel. We’ve been hearing about you, master, your ears ought to have been tingling!’

‘*Did* they tingle, Allen?’ inquired Lettice with interest; ‘is that why they’re so red?’

‘About me?’ he replied to his father, giving himself up for denounced, but yet relieved, too, that Chadwick seemed far from angry.

‘Ah, your mother’ (he sometimes spoke of her in this manner) ‘has been saying how well you were riding this afternoon when you passed the carriage.’

Allen looked at her half imploringly; but there was no malice or irony in her bland smile. Then he remembered that Bob was wearing a suit of about the same hue as his own, and, with the change of headgear, might easily pass a casual inspection.

‘I shouldn’t have known it was you, but for Hussar,’ Lettice chimed in, ‘and you never looked at us once, Allen!’

'Don't tease, Lettice,' said her mother; 'but another time, dear boy, I must just hint that even relations expect a bow in passing like that—you didn't think of it, and really, Joshua, I was quite pleased to see how well he sat his horse; you must have taken great pains with him!'

'I thought you were riding very well, Allen,' added Margot, quite sincerely, from an impulse—rare, it must be owned, with her—to conquer her own prejudices when he deserved credit. His father appeared to resent her remark for some reason.

'Rides well,' he said, glowering at her. 'Of course he rides well! I wouldn't give much for him if he couldn't stick on a horse like Hussar by this time; but what *you* know about it, one way or the other, is beyond me, young lady!'

'I should have thought,' said Miss Chevening, with a touch of haughtiness, 'that it was easy enough to tell, even in a passing glimpse, whether a person has a good seat or not. I do claim so much.'

'Margot really has some right to an opinion, Joshua,' put in her mother. 'She rides extremely well herself; her father taught her when she was quite small, and, as long as I could afford it, she rode constantly.'

'Ah, well,' said Chadwick, 'Margot can do everything, it appears. I suppose the next thing will be that I shall have to get a lady's mount for her.'

'I never asked such a thing, that I am aware of,' said Mrs. Chadwick.

'Nor I,' added Margot, with hot cheeks.

'There—there—don't fly out!' he said, recovering his good humour. 'I don't say I mayn't do that—when I've time to look round me a bit and see where I am. There's the gong! Now, Allen, where's your manners? Come off that high horse of yours, and give your arm to your sister.'

So the four elder members of the family went in to dinner, at which Chadwick's pride and satisfaction in his son's equestrian promise broke out afresh from time to time, though in the form of a clumsy description of chaff. He drank to his coming successes in the hunting-field, and there was a distinctly kindlier look in his rather bloodshot eyes when he looked at the young man.

It might be fancy, but Allen thought that another pair of eyes which met his across the table had a more friendly shine in their fringed hazel depths. He did not feel quite so much on sufferance as usual; he gathered confidence gradually, and courage too, and began to take another view of his conduct. He could have ridden the horse quite well, only he chose to lend it to Barchard. What harm was there in that? He would not do it again; to be sure, as his father would ride out as usual with him on the morrow, that would be unnecessary; he must learn to manage Hussar as soon as he can, and these compliments would be deserved some day.

That evening, as Chadwick walked round the billiard table,

which had never been used in his father's life-time, he limped slightly, and from time to time gave vent to a sharp whistle. 'Only the gout, my boy,' he said; 'my poor father suffered from it all his life, and it's beginning to find me out at last. If I'm not better to-morrow, I'll have to give up riding for a bit, but that needn't make any difference to you, of course.' 'Oh, of course,' said Allen. But his heart sank again.

And the next day his father's foot was worse, and orders were given that Hussar alone was to be saddled for the morning ride. There was no escape. Allen went round to the stables, and looked at Hussar, who eyed him with a backward glance of depreciatory distrust.

'You 'ad him out a goodish while yesterday, sir,' said Topham, 'but he ain't none the worse to-day. Don't ride him too much on the curb, if you'll excuse me tellin' of you, and he'll go like a lamb.'

Alas for Allen's good resolves! He walked straight down to the village, to a certain house with a large board above the door, 'Barchard, Plumber and Decorator.' There was a yard, with a shed or workshop behind, and outside this he found Bob lounging.

'Bob,' he said, with a pitiful attempt to seem careless, 'I shall be going out for a ride in half an hour. Could you be outside our gates by then, do you think?'

'Dunno about that,' said young Barchard, with the air of the Industrious Apprentice. 'I promised father I'd see to the stacking of some drain-pipes as are coming in.'

'Oh, go on!' exclaimed Allen, 'you told me you never did any work except when you cared. You can come, if you like; and, I say, Bob, I don't feel safe alone.'

'Well,' said Bob, 'I'm blowed if you *are* safe alone, and that's true enough; but if I come and see arter you, you'll have to pay me for loss o' time; that's on'y fair, you know.'

So an arrangement was arrived at; Allen being careful to walk Hussar down the drive and along the road until he saw Bob. He made a faint attempt to preserve something more of his self-respect than the day before. 'I only want you just to tell me how to manage him,' he said. 'I shan't get off to-day.'

'Well, you've got your near sterrup wrong way, to start with,' said Bob. 'Woa, hoss! why, you're like a babby on him, you are—quiet, then—he's wonderful fresh this morning; he'll be off with ye, if ye don't give him his head a bit.'

'He's more likely to be off with me if I *do*!' said the unfortunate Allen.

'Either way,' was the unsympathetic reply, 'I can't be of much use to you on this sidewalk, so I'll be off home and see to those drain-pipes.'

'No; but look here, Bob,' protested Allen, 'I can't go back yet. I know I'm not equal to managing him. What the dickens am I to do if you go and leave me?'

'Do?' said Bob, with a grin. 'Get off and lead him; for, as

sure as the Lord made small apples, if you don't get down of your own accord, he'll help you! Haw-haw! to think of you walking about all the morning with that great horse on your arm! Folks'll laugh to see such doings!

'It's very fine for you to chaff,' said Allen. 'You've been used to a horse—I haven't—what else am I to do?'

'What you did yesterday. I'll take him off your hands for an hour or so; I'll make time for that, to oblige you, and if I don't bring him back as quiet as a lamb, my name isn't Barchard. There, off you get, and take a little stroll through the wood and that, till you hear me whistling.'

'But you'll be known if you're seen!'

'What if I am? I've nought to be ashamed of. I shan't split on you, don't you be feared. And I tell you, without lying, it ain't safe for you to ride him yourself—no, that it ain't!'

So the transfer was effected, not only for that, but many subsequent mornings, for Chadwick's gout made it difficult for him to ride at first, and he seemed to lose any wish to do so even when he might. 'I don't care much for it,' he would say; 'I only rode as much as I did to put Allen in the way of it, and now that he's getting such a crack—how many miles did you go this morning, hey? That's right, get as much out of your horse as you can, he'll be none the worse for it!'

Every day Allen vowed either to overcome his fears and let Hussar do his worst, or to tell his father frankly that he was unable to ride the horse; and every day either course became more impossible. Chadwick only saw him mount and dismount occasionally, and, Allen being able to avoid any open exhibition of incapacity, aroused no suspicions of the real truth, and had to listen again and again to his father's boastful references to the admirable manner in which he had mounted his son, and the unexpected talent the boy had revealed as an equestrian.

Some of his hearers would receive these remarks with a covert smile, thinking, no doubt, that the amount of skill required to ride a well-bred hunter along country roads was not excessive enough to justify these paternal pæans; but Chadwick saw nothing. It is possible, however, that they knew or suspected enough to make Chadwick's complacency seem even more ridiculous. Gorsecombe was not more incurious than the average English village in the affairs of its neighbours, and a plumber's son, however much above his business, could not ride a horse like Hussar in public long without giving rise to comment.

'That young chap of Barchard's come into a fortun' seemin'ly,' observed the postman one evening, as he refreshed himself after his labours in the kitchen of the Seven Stars.

'Lor,' now, has he though?' said Mrs. Parkinjeary; 'on'y to think o' that! 'Twill be a load off his poor father and mother's minds, for he's not one, by all I hear, to make one for himself. But who was it told ye, Posty?'

'Why, I've seen him about lately, c'reerin' along as grand as you please on a bright chestnut oss, as looks a thoroughbred 'un, and no mistake.'

'Barchard ain't got on'y that old oss as he drives in the cart,' said the corn-dealer, 'and he an't no thoroughbred, I'll lay!'

'All I know is,' said the postman, 'as he's been ridin' a chestnut as Sir Everard hisself wouldn't be 'shamed to be seen on. He may ha' stole it for what I can say—he's rip enough.'

'Mister Chadwick up at Agra' 'Ouse bought a chestnut 'unter for his son to ride, that's the on'y oss o' that colour I know of 'bout yere.'

'And that'll be the one,' said Mrs. Parkinjea, 'for him and that young Barchard was quite friendly together, so my dear darter tells me, though, being a gentleman, he should ha' kep' his proper place with friends in his own rank accordin'—another mug, Postman?' (Here Mrs. Parkinjea, after much fumbling, produced the cellar keys from her pocket.) 'Run down, Cassandry, my dear, and draw it. Depend upon it that young Barchard will have talked him into lendin' the hoss to cut a dash on, which, if my opinion was asked, I call bein' good-natured to them as little deserves such kindness.'

And some rumour must have reached Miss Momber's ears, for, having on one of her calls, which she made rather frequently, found Mrs. Chadwick alone, she began almost immediately. 'Now I do hope you'll not think me officious if I mention something I think it's right you should know!—it's about your son.'

'My step-son, I think you must mean; my son is away at school.'

'Exactly—your step-son. Well, there's a young fellow in the village, the son of Barchard the plumber, not a very steady young man, we fear, and that makes him all the more likely to be unsettled by being taken up by those superior to him. We can't help thinking it *such* a mistake for young Mr. Chadwick to lend this lad his horse, as he constantly does—we have seen him on it so many times!'

'Is that all, dear Miss Momber? I was afraid it was something very dreadful indeed. If Allen likes to be good-natured, I have no right in the world to prevent him, or to dictate to him about the friendships he forms, though I may wish he showed better taste. I am only his step-mother, you know, and he pays no attention to me; you must speak to Mr. Chadwick about it; but thank you so much for thinking of telling me.'

That evening at dinner she said suddenly: Joshua, do you know there is something wrong with the pipes in the conservatory? I suppose there's somebody in the village who could come up and see what's wrong with them. Who was it that told me that the son of that man—Barchard, isn't it?—was so clever; why, isn't he a friend of yours, Allen?'

'I know him to speak to,' said Allen.

'Oh, you needn't blush, you silly boy; one can have friends in every class of life; and at all events, I should like this young Barchard to look at those pipes. Are you going to ride to-morrow?'

'I—I don't know,' said Allen; 'Hussar has to be shod in the morning.'

'Then you will go out in the afternoon, so I want you to look in at Barchard's as you go by, and tell the young man—not the father, I'm sure he is a stupid old thing—the young man to come up and see me at once. You won't forget?'

'I'll fetch him back with me.'

'Do,' said Mrs. Chadwick blandly, 'if you don't think it will take too long, because I am going to ask you to ride over to Closeborough for me as well to-morrow.'

'To Closeborough!' stammered Allen. She might as well ask him to ride to Khiva!

'Why not?' she said smiling. 'Surely that's nothing to such an accomplished horseman; it's about those ices for next Thursday. I want you to go to Tarrant's, and leave a message for me.'

'Perhaps you'd like him to bring the ices back in his pockets, eh, Allen?' said his father; 'but you'll have plenty of time to go there and back before dark, if you don't start till the afternoon. You can put up for half an hour at the Crown, you know. I dare say I shall think of some things I want you to order by-and-by.'

Allen lay awake that night, racking his brains to think how he might evade this difficulty; he was not fertile of resources, poor fellow, and was paralysed by this sudden emergency. He could only think of being taken conveniently ill, and an uneasy conscience made him apprehensive that this, taken in conjunction with Bob's engagement, might only provoke his father's suspicions.

So he decided that things must take their course. Perhaps Hussar might not be fit to go out next day; upon one point he was determined, he would not ride him to Closeborough alone. He had entered into an arrangement with Bob by which the time and place of meeting were signified by a scrap of paper placed under a particular stone outside the gates, and he did this as usual in the morning.

In the afternoon Hussar was brought round, tossing his head and pawing the gravel impatiently. His father came out to see him mount. 'Call at that ironmonger's in the Market Place,' he said, 'and ask 'em why the dence they're so long about those gardening tools, and stop at the saddler's and tell him he can send for that harness now. Remember your mother's commissions—young Barchard to come up at once (not that I see what use he'll be) and the ices—that's all.'

'He's riding devilish loose to-day,' he said to himself, as he watched him down the drive. 'Why don't he make Hussar go straight? Hasn't settled down in his saddle yet.'

'That wasn't Allen I heard just now?' said his wife, as he entered her sitting-room later in the afternoon, 'he—he hasn't started, surely!'

'Just this minute—why, did you want him to do anything else for you? it's too late now.'

'I didn't think he would really go, Joshua!' she said; 'I meant to have told him that, if he would at all rather not——'

'He may just as well ride to Closeborough as anywhere else,' said her husband. 'What's the matter with you to-day, Selina? You seem put out about something!'

'I was only wondering,' she said, 'why that young Barchard does not come.'

'Oh, I told Allen to be sure and send him up—he won't forget, though why you send for a young fellow like that, I don't understand!'

He left his wife to her own meditations, which were just then none of the most agreeable. Careful as she was to hide it, she disliked this step-son of hers intensely; in secret she more than sympathised with her daughters for having to accept him as a companion and equal. He affected her nerves; she regarded him as an eyesore, a glaring incongruity, and never saw him with her children without an inward revolt. She had tried to open her husband's eyes to his son's deficiencies, but gently and cautiously as she insinuated her detraction, it made no way, and she was clever enough to see that she would only defeat her own aim by persisting. And soon she was able to hope that Allen would require no external aid in forfeiting his father's good opinion. Upon that afternoon when Hussar passed the carriage on the Closeborough Road, her eye at least had not been deceived for an instant, and Allen's subsequent demeanour had enabled her to guess pretty accurately what had passed. All that she need do was to wait, to make a few inquiries, to encourage her husband in his confidence as much as possible, and leave it to Time and Chance to bring about an exposure.

If it was really true that Allen never ventured to ride Hussar himself, and habitually transferred him to a humble acquaintance, there could be no doubt that this would injure him seriously in his father's opinion. But, except on that first occasion, she had no positive evidence, only her suspicions, to go upon, until Miss Momber supplied the necessary confirmation. How could she expose him best without seeming to do so intentionally? Might she not, by engaging him to ride at a time when he knew that his friend's services were otherwise secured, force him to refuse in such a manner as to betray his deception? It was worth the trial; she had expected confidently that he would shuffle out of it at the last moment—but he had started after all. She smiled as she thought that, if he got this young Barchard to be his substitute this time, she would have ample means of discovering it, and allowing the fact to become clear in the most natural of ways. Then suddenly an ugly thought occurred to her. Suppose she had gone too far? Suppose he was on his guard, or had accidentally missed Barchard, or for any other reason was foolhardy enough to go to Closeborough alone? She had not reckoned this as possible before, but if it

were. What chance would such a rider as Allen have upon a powerful hunter which he had not had the nerve to ride alone? If—if anything were to happen to him! Mrs. Chadwick was not strong-minded enough to regard such a possibility as this with equanimity; she had never intended it; she was frightened now to think that she might have rendered it possible. She took up a novel and tried to forget her anxiety by reading, till the fast fading light made it first difficult, then impossible, and she sat thinking, unable to summon up courage to ring for lights. At last she did so, and when the butler brought in the lamp, was astonished to find how late it was. 'Has Mr. Allen come back yet, Masterman?' she asked.

'Not to my knowledge, ma'am.'

'It—it's rather a dark evening, isn't it, Masterman?'

'It is, ma'am, very dark; I don't know when I've seen it come on so dark, indeed, for the time of year. Seems a sort of blight, like, ma'am.'

'It does seem so; where are the young ladies?'

'In the schoolroom, ma'am, with the governess. Miss Margot and Miss Lettice came in some time ago—been out walking, ma'am. Did you wish to see them?'

'No, no, don't disturb them. It is getting so late. I must go up to dress soon; and, Masterman, as soon as Mr. Allen comes in from his ride let me know at once.'

'Very good, ma'am.' So Masterman withdrew, and Mrs. Chadwick again tried to absorb her thoughts in her author, and with no better success.

It was past the usual dinner hour when Mrs. Chadwick, who had gone up to her room, heard sounds outside of a strange voice in the hall below, a sort of subdued bustle, her husband's tones raised—was it in alarm? She listened with her hand on her heart till the sounds died away, then she rang violently.

Susan appeared with a white face: 'Oh, ma'am,' she began, 'I knew there'd be something 'appen! Topham said only this afternoon that Mr. Allen didn't ought to be allowed out alone on Hussar. And now it's come true—isn't it dreadful, mum?'

'Just tell me as quietly as you can what has happened,' said Mrs. Chadwick, controlling her voice by an effort; 'remember, I know nothing.'

'It was the men in the signal-box by the cutting between Gorsecombe and Closeborough; they saw a horse with someone on him galloping along the line; it was too dark to tell, but they thought he was running away. That was an hour ago, mum. And the station-master came up just now and asked to see master. They've found something on the line, mum—a body, I believe. Master went off to see about it. He was like someone out of his mind, mum!'

'Have you heard whether Barchard—younge Barchard, the son—is—is at home or not?'

Susan stared, naturally failing to understand the relevancy of the question at such a time.

'Young Barchard, mum? Masterman was passing there a few minutes back, before this awful news come, mum, and, knowing you wanted someone to come about the hot-water pipes, he went in to speak about it.'

'Yes—yes,' gasped Mrs. Chadwick.

'Barchard said his son was only just in, mum, but he'd send him up as soon as he could.'

'That will do, Susan. Tell Miss Margot to come to me instantly.'

CHAPTER IV.

DISMOUNTED.

Il y a des gens destinés à être sots.

Il n'y a guère de poltrons qui connoissent toujours toute
leur peur. *La Rochefoucauld*

'WHAT are you looking back like that for, Lettie?' asked Margot, as they walked along the high road together on the afternoon which their mother was spending as we have already seen. 'Yarrow is ahead.'

'I know,' said Lettice. 'I was only thinking that perhaps Allen would come by.'

'And can't you be happy without seeing Allen for an hour or two?' said Margot, with a little accent of jealous reproach.

'Ah, but I've never seen him on Hussar, except just that one time, and he went by so fast then. I wish I could ride like Allen—he does ride well, Margot; you know you said so yourself. I shall ask Allen to let me ride Hussar some day. I rode that donkey (the nice one) at Littlehampton quite easily. Wouldn't you like to ride Hussar, Margot?'

'Very much, dear.'

'I'm sure he would let you if you asked him. Shall I ask him? I'm a regular pal of his now, Margot. I didn't cotton to him at all, at first, you know, but he's awfully good-natured.'

'Lettie, you will get to talk just like a little common girl soon—you don't know how ugly it sounds. I wish you wouldn't be quite so much with Allen.'

'He likes to have me with him. At least, I asked him if he minded once, and he said no.'

'I was thinking of *you*—you mustn't copy his expressions or his manners, darling, they are not pretty.'

'Oh, but I'm curing him of them, Margot. Haven't you noticed he hardly ever speaks with his mouth full now, and I've taught him

no gentleman *ever* shoots bread pills. And I've heard *you* talk slang, Margot.'

'I'm not a pattern person, darling, but at least I'm a better example for you than he is. There, I don't want to run him down—he has his good points, but you mustn't borrow your expressions from him; you used to be so particular, Lettice!'

'I'm tired of being particular—it's better fun being the other thing.'

Margot laughed; she knew very well that her hint had told. 'Haven't you had enough of this tiresome road?' she said. 'Suppose we go back through the wood and across the field.'

'Right you are!' said Lettice cheerfully; 'I knew I'd catch you that time, Margot! That doesn't come from Allen at all—but Mr. Fanshawe, who's a clergyman. Just saying it the wrong side up can't be vulgar, you know. Why, it sounds twice as well as "you are right!"'

Margot wisely declined to contest this statement. 'Call Yarrow to heel,' she said, 'or he may do some mischief in these woods.'

They had entered the pine wood which bordered the road, and passed up the soft tan-coloured lane with moss-grown ruts. The bracken was springing up in little green croziers on the raised banks, the new growth on young fir trees spiced the air, cuckoos were calling from the distant fields, a solemn gloom reigned under the sad green branches.

'It's evening in here,' said Lettice, 'and I don't see Yarrow anywhere—listen, that's his bark, he's found something he likes—he always barks like that when he's pleased, let's go and see what it is.'

They struck through the wood obliquely, and presently saw the collie leaping and dancing delightedly around something unseen: he came bounding to them, barked, and ran off again, looking over his shoulder as an intimation that they were to follow.

'It isn't something, Margot, it's somebody,' whispered Lettice; 'and he is trying to make Yarrow be quiet and go away—why, it's Allen's voice!'

She ran forward, and Allen, seeing further concealment was useless, came out from behind the big pine trunk, which, but for Yarrow's well-meant amiability, would have screened him effectually.'

'Have you come back already?' asked Lettice innocently; 'how fast you must have ridden! Was it all right about the ices, Allen?'

'Oh, don't bother me,' he said roughly. 'I suppose you'll go telling everybody where you've seen me now!'

Lettice drew herself up: 'I'm not a tell-tale,' she said, 'and I think you're very unkind.'

Here Margot joined them. 'You can't possibly have been over to Clcseborough and returned already,' she said; 'it is quite eight miles from here. What has become of the horse, too?'

Embarrassment made him brutal: 'You mind your business,' he said, 'and I'll do the same.'

Margot's flexible lips curled in disgust: 'By all means,' she said; 'I have no curiosity in anything that concerns you. Come, Lettice, we will leave him.'

'No,' he cried, 'don't go yet. I—I don't know what it is I do say, or I should never speak that way—to you. If I was to tell you, you'd see how it was.'

'Run on, Lettice, and wait by the stile at the edge of the wood till I come. Now, Allen,' she continued presently, 'what is all this mystery about? Have you had a fall from your horse? What of it? There's no disgrace in that. Is Hussar lamed?'

'No,' he said, 'I haven't had a fall. I wish I had. Hussar's right enough. If I thought you'd keep it a secret——'

'I shall certainly not promise till I know what it is; but I don't wish to hear it unless you would rather tell me.'

'I—I think I would rather,' said the poor fellow. 'I may as well out with it now as later, and I know you won't split on me.'

So, in a halting, sheepish fashion, he told his humiliating story, of which the reader is already in possession except the concluding stage. He had found Hussar more unmanageable than ever that afternoon, it seemed, and, on meeting Bob outside as usual, the temptation not to deliver his step-mother's message, and induce Bob to ride to Closeborough and execute the various commissions there in his stead, had proved irresistible—and now he was waiting here for Barchard to return.

From time to time his narrative was interrupted by Margot's irrepressible laughter—laughter in which there was a ringing undertone of a deeper contempt than she had ever felt for him before. He was divesting himself of the one quality and the single accomplishment that had been leading her to tolerate him of late. She could make no allowances for him. The very awkwardness and seriousness with which he made his confession rendered it the more fatally ludicrous in her eyes.

'Oh, Allen!' she said, as he ended, 'it really is too comic! To be afraid of poor dear Hussar—why, *Lettie* could ride him!'

'Likely enough,' he retorted sullenly; '*I* can't anyway. Bob says he could do what he likes with me.'

'Bob is so very disinterested,' said Margot. 'You foolish fellow, can't you see that Bob did everything he could to frighten you into giving him up? And this has been going on every day. And, oh! the stories you have told! And your father thinking you were getting on so well! Why, you will be the laughing-stock of the whole place—and I'm sure you deserve it.'

'Are you going to tell them?'

'As if I should give myself the trouble!' said Margot contemptuously; 'but do you really expect to go on like this for ever? It is sure to come out some day, and if you are wise you will not leave your father to hear it from others. If you haven't nerve

enough to ride, own it, and don't make yourself more ridiculous—if that is possible—than you are already. Go back and tell your father that you feel much safer on two legs than four, and that it was a mistaken kindness of him to give you a horse for a present.'

He writhed. 'You come down pretty hard on me,' he said.

'Oh, I don't pretend to pity you a bit, Allen; it is too contemptible from beginning to end.'

'Well,' he returned, '*you* won't be the worse for it, at all events. I shall get father to let you have Hussar.'

If he hoped to conciliate her thus he was disappointed. Margot's merciless laughter rang out afresh. 'How generous of you! Are you quite sure you can make such a sacrifice? I am afraid—unfortunately for me—your father will not be very likely to be guided by your wishes on that point after this.'

But through her mind the thought flashed eagerly. It was quite possible that she might be allowed to ride Hussar. Oh, the joy of being on a horse once more! Would there be any loss of dignity in accepting the mere use of him? Her eyes danced at the prospect, in spite of her words.

'Now, will you go back with Lettice and me—or what?' she said.

'I must stop about here till Bob comes back,' he replied uneasily.

'So you *will* play out your little comedy? And are you really venturesome enough to ride Hussar all the way back—nearly half a mile!—or will Bob hold you on? Pray don't run any risks.'

In spite of her merciless mockery he could not hate her; she looked so bewitching in the sombre half light under those gloomy pines, he would have given his life just then to win back her respect. She stood there a moment, and then, with a curt little nod, she turned away amongst the red pine stems.

He followed her with his eyes till the last glimpse of her dress had disappeared, and then, with a dull acquiescence in his own humiliation, he resumed his waiting.

The sky was no longer visible through the trees, the gloom grew more intense, the silence deeper, only broken by the sharp cracking and rustling of branches and the mysterious minute stir of invisible life. Why did not Bob return? He should have done so before this—it was pitch dark in the wood. He groped his way to the high road, which now showed only as a grey glimmer under a low starless heaven—there was nothing to be heard. Could Bob have passed already unnoticed?

He waited about in growing uneasiness, walking a few yards now in one direction, now in the other, hoping against hope that all was right. He could not present himself at home without knowing what had become of Hussar, but at length it occurred to him as just possible that Bob might have brought him back to the stables himself, and he decided to go back and see if this were so.

Bob Barchard had passed an hour or two very agreeably at the bar of the Crown Hotel at Closeborough, thanks to the combined attractions of gin and water and a good-looking barmaid. It was somewhat late before he gave orders for 'his horse' to be brought round, and mounted under the admiring inspection of the barmaid, who came to the steps to see him depart, evidently taking him, as he felt with much satisfaction, for some young gentleman-farmer. He did not trouble himself about the various commissions which Allen had delegated to him—in fact, he had forgotten them—so he started back on the Gorsecombe road at a brisk pace till he reached a part where the road was lined on either side with tall elms. Here the darkness, which, even in the open was unusual at so advanced a season, was intense, and he walked his horse, guiding himself by the hedge he could just make out upon his right hand. He was a little drowsy and careless, and felt nothing but a muddled surprise that the road, which he had believed to be level, should decline as it did. He put it down to a symptom of his condition. Presently he thought he must have turned off the track in some way he could not account for, or how was it that the road seemed to be running alongside at a gradually rising level? He must get back—he roused Hussar and made him scramble back somehow; but the road he was on was not the same as that he had left—softer, with shiny ruts that gleamed dully as if it were winter. Stop—*were* they ruts? What was Hussar stumbling at? He held him up and brought him to a standstill, and as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he began to recognise where he was. In some way he did not understand he had got upon the line; those were the metals which he had taken for ruts. Well, he must get off again as soon as he could. He turned Hussar's head and urged him to return the way he had come; but the horse, confused by the strange feel of the ground, the darkness and the faint vibrating hum which was borne down the line, pricked his ears and refused to stir. Bob grew impatient; he had no spurs, but he dug him in the ribs with his right heel, and then struck him smartly with the little stick he carried. Hussar became restive, and his rider began to see that he would require all his coolness if he was to induce him to obey. He coaxed him gradually to step across the rails, which he evidently regarded with distrust, and was on the point of succeeding when a long harsh scream in the distance upset the horse's already strained nerves. Bob himself was scarcely less startled; he knew what it must be—the express! There was not much time to lose, and in his hurry and alarm he pulled the curb sharply. Hussar plunged a little; the scream rose again, this time accompanied by a sullen roar, and the next moment the horse had swerved away from the quarter whence the noise proceeded, and was galloping at full speed down the line. The ballast had been freshly laid, and formed a better track than might have been expected, but at any moment an uncovered sleeper might cause a stumble, and then—Bob shivered to think of it!

Faster and faster they went ; he was as powerless as Allen might have been to stop the terrified animal now, and the roar and rumble behind were coming nearer and nearer. They were not on the same line of rails, but he knew he would not be able to control his course much longer ; even if he could, the effect of an express passing at full speed upon a horse already frantic would bring their career to the inevitable end. Louder and louder grew the roar, and Hussar was flying more and more madly along the ballast. Bob was perfectly sober now ; the shock had cleared his brain. He clung to the saddle instinctively, though he knew that his case was desperate and the end must be soon. He was even impatient for it all to be over now, and, as they tore along, he suddenly thought of the pretty barmaid at Closeborough, and wondered what she would say when she heard. They were passing a signal-cabin now ; the men in it shouted at him from the lighted windows, and he thought bitterly what fools they were if they supposed he was riding like this for pleasure. All this took scarcely an instant ; the express was close behind him now. He could hear it bounding fiercely along the track, and now he saw two glaring lights and a trail of flame-touched steam ahead—the up-train had just left Gorsecombe station.

He was directly in its track, and, if he kept his seat now, nothing could save him. There was only one chance, and he took it ; he shook his feet out of the stirrups, put his hands on the front of his saddle, shut his eyes, and, letting go the reins, threw himself off before the engine passed him.

When he recovered his senses, he was lying on his back in a bed of soft rushes below the railway bank ; the roar and rattle were still in his head, but he staggered to his feet and found himself unhurt, though bruised and giddy and shaken. He clambered up to the line again ; the metals were still warm, but the two trains had vanished, and of the horse he could find no trace.

It was characteristic of Bob that the first use he made of his recovered faculties was to swear at his ill-luck. When he had relieved his feelings to some extent in this fashion, he limped along to a level crossing which brought him into the high road again at a point within an easy distance from the village.

Margot, hastily summoned by Susan, found her mother in an almost distracted state.

‘Tell me what you know,’ she whispered. ‘Allen has not come home. *What* is it that happened to him?’

Margot, who had heard nothing, was struck with wonder at this sudden solicitude on Allen’s account. ‘Happened to Allen?’ she said. ‘Why—nothing, mother!’

‘You are keeping something from me ; that horse has killed him—I know it, Margot ; and all through me. My God ! what shall I do?’

‘No, no,’ said Margot, throwing her arms around her mother

with a return of her old affection. 'You poor darling, it is a shame that you should be frightened like this. The horse cannot have hurt him, because he took care not to give it the opportunity. There, I half promised not to tell, but I can't see you in such a state and say nothing.' So she related her interview with Allen in the wood. 'He has not come home because he was ashamed to; and no wonder! *Now* are you satisfied? And how could it be through you, in any case?'

Mrs. Chadwick began to recover her self-control. 'Did I say so?' she asked. 'I was so horribly anxious, Margot, and—and it was I who asked him to ride over to Closeborough for me, that was all. Ah, here is your father. Joshua, tell me—was there nothing really the matter after all?'

He was still pale, and his face wore a heavy scowl. 'If you call a two-hundred-guinea horse cut to pieces on the railway nothing,' he said—'I don't myself.'

'Cut to pieces! Oh, poor Hussar!' cried Margot, turning pale. 'And—and young Barchard—he was not—not killed?'

'So you knew of it, too!' he said. 'I suppose I was the only one in the dark. Killed! I wish he had been! A nice fellow he is to be trusted with a horse like that. And Allen—there's a son to be proud of! Why, I've been half mad with thinking he'd broken his neck, or worse. I might have spared myself! And you two were in this precious secret, were you, helping him to make a fool of me, eh?'

'You are quite wrong,' said Margot. 'I only knew this afternoon when we met him in the woods, and he told me he was afraid to ride the horse, and mother did not know till this very minute. I don't think you have any right to accuse us of such things.'

'I was wrong—there! Can't you see I'm not my own master? Where is that boy? I must have this out with him, and he'll hear some things he won't forget in a hurry. Have dinner without me, it's cold by this time. I can't touch anything!'

'How you are trembling, dear!' said Margot to her mother, when he had left the room; 'you are not frightened now, surely?'

'I—I have been a little upset by all this,' was the reply. 'That wretched boy!—let us be thankful it is no worse.'

'It is bad enough,' said Margot, 'to think of that beautiful horse being killed in this terrible way, and all because he was such a coward; it makes me hate him, mother!'

'I had been hoping to see *you* ride Hussar some day,' said Mrs. Chadwick.

'Don't talk about it,' entreated Margot. 'What does all that matter now? But, oh, I hope he will be made to feel ashamed of himself!'

'I think,' replied her mother rather grimly, 'that his father will take care of that.'

Allen had gone guiltily in by the stable-yard, but the stables

were dark and closed, the coachman was probably at his meals indoors; he stole into the house and was met by Masterman.

'I was to say,' said that functionary, 'that master wished to see you the minute you come in, Mr. Allen, in the study.'

'Is—is anything up?' asked Allen; he did not dare to inquire whether Hussar had returned.

'I can't give you any information, sir, really,' was the answer, in a tone of lofty disapproval, for Topham had been bitter in his laments just before.

Allen went into the study.

'So here you are at last, sir,' was his father's greeting. 'And what have *you* got to say for yourself?'

'I—I know I haven't been acting quite—quite straight, guv'nor,' said Allen; 'but it's no use, I can't ride that horse any more.'

Chadwick gave a short, furious laugh. 'Well, no,' he said, 'you've taken care of that—do you know where he is now?'

'N—no,' said Allen.

'Well, the friend you were so good as to lend him to took him for a gallop along the line, and they found all that was left of the poor beast in the six-foot way an hour ago—that's good news for you, I dare say!'

Allen felt cold and sick. 'And Bob?' he said; 'what of Bob?'

'Oh, don't be alarmed; Bob's not born for that sort of end. He wasn't even scratched. I've just had a talk with him, and heard how you've been taking your horse-exercise lately. A nice story it was, too!'

Allen was too much relieved to mind anything else just then; his father broke into a torrent of abuse, stimulated rather than disarmed by his silence; shame, wounded vanity, resentment at having been duped, anger at the loss of a valuable horse—all contributed to lend variety and force to Chadwick's expressions.

'There,' he said at last, 'I've tried to make a man of you, and this is all I've got for it. I'm damned if your fit for anything but counter-jumping. It's enough to make a man wish he'd never had a son, all this shirking and skulking and lying. Tchah! get out of my sight; be off to bed, and stay there for all I care!'

Allen was glad enough to go; he was worn out and stunned to a sort of indifference, and yet, as he went up to his room, he had a forlorn feeling that henceforth his life would be changed, that the place he had so lately occupied in his father's affections was, through his own miserable folly and cowardice, lost to him for ever.

CHAPTER V.

A SOJOURN IN COVENTRY.

Le ridicule déshonore plus que le déshonneur.—*La Rochefoucauld.*

It was natural that such conduct as Allen's should cause some change in his father's feelings towards him, but Mrs. Chadwick herself could not have desired a more complete alteration than that which followed. He had always persuaded himself that the deficiencies of his son's early education would not hinder him from becoming a fairly creditable country gentleman now that he was given opportunities. In this way he had salved his conscience for the neglect of many years, during which, with a little less self-indulgence, he might have done more for his son.

Forced as he was now to recognise that the results of that neglect could never be effaced, if he felt his own responsibility at all, the only effect it had was to put a keener edge upon his anger and infuse into his contempt a bitterer flavour.

For some time after Hussar's catastrophe, Chadwick led his son a wretched life, never losing an opportunity of indulging in some caustic allusion. 'Wilkins was asking me to-day' (Wilkins was the Gorsecombe station-master) 'whether he should send up Hussar's saddle and bridle,' he said on one occasion, when they were all at luncheon. 'They're not fit for anything now, but I suppose he thought' (he was addressing Allen) 'that you might like to keep 'em as a souvenir or something of that sort. Perhaps you would?'

Allen flinched and changed colour, as he declined these ghastly relics.

'Well, I dare say you're right,' was the retort, given with a short rasping laugh; 'you had precious little connection with 'em. I forgot that. Your friend, Bob Barchard, is the man they ought to go to; he's fairly earned 'em.'

His anger, which was nourished for some time by the curiosity and condolences of all Gorsecombe, abated at length, and lapsed into a contemptuous indifference with an occasional sarcastic outburst, but his confidence had gone for ever. Fate had seen fit to afflict him with a son who was an incorrigible cub, an abject cockney. He must put up with it, he supposed, but he could not forget how he had been deceived, or overcome his disgust at Allen's ingratitude and cowardice.

This change of attitude could not fail to have a certain effect upon the behaviour of the other members of his family, as it removed all necessity for keeping up an appearance of cordial relations with Allen. They did not attack him after his father's fashion, though Miss Henderson and Ida permitted themselves occasionally a languidly malicious innuendo, which generally missed its mark.

Mrs. Chadwick, indeed, was a model of frigid forbearance, while Margot spared his feelings from some latent instinct of generosity, and still more from a sense of his insignificance.

But, though he took a long time to find it out, there was no longer any attempt to disguise that his presence in the drawing-room of an evening was not a source of unmixed delight. He could not wander now, as he liked to do, from one to the other, making blundering attempts to join the conversation or game, or amusing himself by teasing Lettice and Ida, without being continually repulsed. It was: 'Allen, *do* you mind moving somewhere else? you are horribly in my light;' or, 'Allen, we do hate to have anybody looking on at us so;' or, 'Please let me alone, Allen, it teases;' and then his step-mother would remark, 'If you could only sit down quietly, and amuse yourself with a book or something, instead of being a perfect nuisance to everybody, it would be *such* a comfort!' and his father would bring up the rear by adjuring him, for God's sake, to do as he was asked, or leave the room.

Whereupon he would sit down and perhaps pretend to be engaged in a book, though he passed most of the time in furtively regarding Margot from behind it.

He fancied sometimes that, when his father indulged in his heavy gibes at his expense, she wore a look of discomfort, which he took for sympathy, and the belief made him able to endure many an unpleasant hour, for his was one of those natures which are capable of drawing a certain morbid pleasure from ill-treatment, if only they can feel that their wrongs excite compassion in the onlooker.

One onlooker at least did not conceal her sympathy, and that was the Miss Chevenings' maid, Susan, who found an opportunity one day to let him know that she considered him shamefully treated. Susan was not, perhaps, the person best entitled in the world to express abhorrence of domestic oppression, but it is not so very unusual for tyrants, large or small, to be moved with very sincere pity for their neighbour's victims.

Susan was of a contradictory turn of mind; she was tired of hearing her fellow-servants abusing the son of the house, particularly when they contrasted him unfavourably with his step-sisters. She exhorted him to stick up for himself, to show a spirit, and let certain people that thought themselves everybody understand that he wasn't to be treated like the dirt under their feet, with many other counsels as outspoken as she thought prudent.

Allen had no dignity to be offended; he was rather touched and grateful than otherwise, and had not experience to see that it was not altogether becoming or safe to encourage clandestine demonstrations of sympathy from a domestic who was far from ill-favoured.

Indeed, with Margot's face constantly before him, he did not so much as notice whether Susan was good-looking or not. He had not so many friends in that household that he could afford to

reject this one, and so, without any intention on his side, a sort of alliance was established between them.

Perhaps Susan had motives of her own. He would be well-off some day, he would not be the first young man who had been induced to make an unequal marriage; and then what a triumph it would be to find herself a sort of step sister-in-law to Miss Margot, especially if she were to hold the purse-strings!

But if she were ever to secure such a prize, she must, she knew, proceed with the greatest caution—the slightest indiscretion, or appearance of haste would be fatal. So she was careful to avoid exciting remark in any way, encountering him now and then apparently by accident, at times when they were unlikely to be disturbed, and adopting a tone of sympathy tempered by respect. She was not without hopes that the evident gratitude he showed would develop into something more, though for the present she was obliged to confess to herself that he gave no sign of anything like admiration.

However, it was fortunate for him in one way that he was less at home than formerly. It is true that the advantage was only relative, as he spent most of the time in the company of young Barchard.

No breach had occurred between Allen and Bob. That young gentleman had contrived to make it appear that he had narrowly escaped becoming the victim of his own self-sacrifice. He was magnanimous and forgiving; for, setting aside the distinction of being on friendly terms with one in Allen's position, the advantages in having a companion with the double recommendation of being always flush of money and readily induced to spend it were not to be lightly thrown away. He had proposed to teach Allen to drive as a respectable substitute for horse-exercise, and the offer was gratefully accepted.

There was a light trap which Bob had persuaded his father to buy, a vehicle which, though not showy, had nothing in its exterior to betray the shop, and the mare, if not much to look at, went well. Allen accompanied him in the business errands which formed the only work Bob consented to undertake, and, under Bob's guidance, he did become a very tolerable whip.

This was better in some ways than loafing about the Agra House grounds, or wandering aimlessly along country roads to kill the time, and no one cared or asked questions about the manner in which he employed his mornings and afternoons.

There was nothing in Barchard's appearance to be ashamed of. He dressed well in a sporting style, for he cultivated the manners and amusements of a higher station, if his tongue betrayed him occasionally. He 'knew his way about,' as he was accustomed to boast, and certainly had a considerable familiarity with such dissipation as Closeborough afforded. All this had its effect upon Allen, who was no great judge of character or breeding; he decidedly preferred Bob's society to his own, and it was generally his only

alternative. But hitherto he had spent his evenings at home, and while in Barchard's company had withstood all temptation to take more drink than was good for him. His chief restraint was the fear of disgracing himself irretrievably in Margot's eyes.

For some time Allen had been troubled by a suspicion that Lettice was kept out of his way; an excuse was always ready—she had her lessons, or her music to do, she was engaged to play a 'single' at tennis with Ida, she was going out to walk or drive with somebody else—the result being that he had never once been alone with her since that afternoon in the pine wood.

He was in the drawing-room after lunch one day with a lingering hope that Margot might condescend to play a game or two of lawn-tennis with him, bad player as he was. The Agra House drawing-room was divided into two by the wall in which the fireplace stood, and on either side of the fireplace was an arch connecting one room with the other, so that, practically, the two rooms were one. Allen was in the further room, and his step-mother was at her writing-table in the other. Presently he heard Lettice come in, evidently much excited. 'Mummy,' she said, 'may I go fishing? William has found a lot of worms under the manure by the stables. And may he come to put them on for me? They're such *leggy* worms, mother!' Mrs. Chadwick consented, and Lettice was off. Here was Allen's chance; he had bought Lettice the fishing-rod himself—she would not refuse to let him accompany her, he thought. So he slipped out, and intercepted her on her way to the stables. 'Going fishing, Lettie?' he said.

'Yes, Allen,' said Lettice shortly.

'You'll want someone to put the worms on,' he said. 'I'll come and do all that for you.'

'Thank you,' said Lettice, 'but I may take William.'

'They won't mind me going with you instead of William.'

Lettice looked down, and spoke in a muffled little voice: 'I would rather William went,' she said. 'I don't want you to come.'

'Someone's put you up to saying that,' he retorted. 'It isn't likely you'd say so of your own accord—such pals as we used to be, Lettie!'

'I'm not pals, which is a very vulgar word, Allen, any longer.'

'Oh, you aren't? Well, look here—just tell me this, what have I done?'

'You let poor dear Hussar be taken on the railway and killed, and Ida says she believes you wanted him to be, because you were afraid to ride him; and you told stories about it. I don't care to go fishing with people who do such things.'

'You don't seem to mind going fishing with the rod I gave you!' He intended this rather as an appeal than a sneer, but Lettice flushed at the reminder, and then, not without an evident struggle, said, 'Did you give it to me? I'd forgotten. Then you may have it back again. I don't want it.'

She held it towards him heroically. 'All right,' he said, as he

took it. 'I didn't think you'd turn against me, but please yourself. I'll give you one more chance,' he added, with the hope of conquering her. 'If you won't take this thing back and let us two be friends again, I'll smash it—it's no use to me. Are you going to take it, or not?'

He might have known that this was the very last way to attempt to move Lettice.

'I have told you once,' she replied; 'I shan't tell you again.'

'Then, there!' he said, and broke it into several pieces; 'that's all you get by that!'

The moment he had done it he was ashamed of the impulse, especially as Lettice, her fortitude at an end, burst into tears. He caught her hands roughly. 'Don't cry, Lettie,' he said, 'I—I didn't mean it. I'll buy you another—a better one, only be friends again!'

She struggled to free herself. 'Let me go, you are hurting my wrists!' she said. 'I hate you—you're a bully; cowards always are!'

He dropped her hands as if they had burnt him. He laughed bitterly. 'Go it!' he said—it was his misfortune that he had no more dignified phrase at command—'don't mind me. You haven't a good word for me now, it seems. Make me out as bad as you can. If you hate me, I can do without you—I'm not so hard up for company as all that!'

Lettice had gone while he was speaking, and he turned away with a lump rising in his throat; he had loved this child; he loved her still; the discovery that she too had withdrawn her friendship had come upon him with a suddenness that had made him forget himself for the moment. And now he had offended her beyond all hope of forgiveness! How he wished now that he had not been so foolish as to threaten to reclaim his gift. Perhaps if he had not done that—well, it was too late to think of that now. He tried to persuade himself that it did not matter, and went down into the village to find Barchard.

'Has Lettie come back from her fishing yet?' Mrs. Chadwick asked Ida, as she came in to afternoon tea from the tennis-court. 'I don't like her to be down by the stream too long.' There was a little stream at the bottom of the grounds, covered with water-lilies, and inhabited by a few minute dace or roach, upon which Lettice had proposed to try her skill.

'She never went,' said Ida. 'Mother, what *do* you think Allen did? I was at the schoolroom window and saw everything. He actually met Lettie and took her rod away and broke it! Poor Lettie came in crying dreadfully, but she wouldn't tell me anything about it.'

'He is getting worse and worse!' said Mrs. Chadwick. 'He is a perfect plague to everyone in the house. And to be brutal to poor dear little Lettie, who has always been so sweet to him. I shall certainly ask his father to interfere. I will not have the child terrified like this!'

She spoke to some purpose, for when Allen entered the room

in his usual shamefaced manner before dinner, Chadwick turned savagely upon him before them all.

'This drawing-room's no place for you, sir,' he said. 'You'll not be allowed to play the rough here. Just walk out of it, and don't let me hear of your ill-treating a child again!'

'He didn't ill-treat me!' declared Lettice. 'Ida, I didn't want you to tell.'

Yarrow had walked up to Allen, and was thrusting his long nose into his hand as he stood there.

'If I'm not to come into the drawing-room,' he said, 'where am I to go?'

'That's your affair,' said his father. 'There's plenty of other rooms in the house without coming here to be an annoyance to everybody.'

'Then I'm not wanted at dinner either, I suppose?' he said, with a sinking heart.

'If you choose to behave decently while you are there, no one wants to prevent you from dining that I know of, but you'll keep out of this place till you have learnt to behave like a gentleman to your sisters.'

Allen went, Yarrow walking with him, much puzzled, as far as the door. He waited in the library till the gong sounded, and then hesitated. If he stayed away from dinner, he would gain nothing by it; he could not give up the pleasure, shot as it was with pain, of sitting opposite to Margot as usual. He pocketed his pride and went in.

Nothing was said to him throughout the meal, and when Mrs. Chadwick and Margot had risen, his father addressed him for the first time. 'If you like to go into the billiard-room,' he remarked, 'it's lighted.'

'Are—are you coming?'

'I? No. I am going into the drawing-room presently. But, as I told you before dinner, the less they see of you in there the better they're pleased. If you will behave like a blackguard, you have yourself to thank for it. You needn't expect me to take your part, after the way you've treated me; it serves me right for thinking I could ever make a gentleman of you!'

Perhaps Chadwick spoke as he did with some purpose of provoking his son to make some profession of sorrow and amendment, but Allen sat silent, afraid, if he spoke, of drawing down a fresh storm upon his head. Chadwick sat moodily smoking his cigar a little while, and then rose abruptly, leaving his son to follow his own devices.

Allen did not go up to the billiard-room; he put on a rough coat and took his pipe, and left the house for the inn in the village, where Bob had often said he spent his evenings. He would infinitely rather have sat in the drawing-room, coldly as he might be received there, but they would not have him, and at least he would be welcome at the White Lion.

It was Whitsuntide, and Nugent Orme had managed to get away from chambers for a few days and come down to the Vicarage. It was always a delight to return to the old home, but never before had he come back with this excited anticipation. For was it not as certain as anything could be that he would meet the girl whose face had never ceased to trouble him for nearly a year now? Whose personality—good or evil, or, like most personalities, a subtle compound of both—fascinated him so powerfully. He heard much about her from his sister Millicent on the evening of his arrival, as they paced the Vicarage lawn together in the dusk after dinner. Very little diplomacy was required to bring Millicent to enlarge upon the subject. She was full of Miss Chevening's praises; her wonderful beauty and the admiration she excited everywhere, her devotion to her sisters, and the sweetness with which she bore home-trials.

Nugent was out soon after breakfast the next day—a lovely morning, with a light breeze and small silver clouds scudding across a sky of the deepest blue. He walked along the broad street, past the familiar little shops whose striped awnings were fluttering gaily; as he neared the infant school, he heard the monotonous rise and fall of rustic voices chanting, 'twice eleven are twenty-two, twice twelve are twenty-four,' with the solemn devotion of persons making a profession of faith. After the roar of London, it seemed very peaceful here, where the only person he met was the old postman in his summer white ducks. At the Seven Stars he turned in to have a talk with Mrs. Parkinjea, an old friend of his. 'Ah, I knew the old lady would be the first you'd come to see, Mr. Nugent,' she told him, 'though the poor old lady can't see you, and a sad deprivation it is to lose one's sight. I step out o' nights sometimes and try if I can see the beautiful moon and the bright stars that in their courses roll, but it's all o' no use—I can't see nothin'; so here I sit in the sunshine and try to be content with the warmth, for we in the morning here, you see, gets it very beautiful, Mr. Nugent, don't us? And how hev you been getting along, sir? Ah, we've felt the want of you here, sir, in the place of your early birth. That Mr. Fanshaw, he don't keep up the cricket club as you used to, and as to the arthritic sports, why, sir, they tell me in the tug-o'-war as Gorsecombe was pulled right over the line first go off by a team like Tadford! I sez when I heard of it, "Ah, they ought to hev had Mr. Nugent there—he'd never ha' bin pulled over the line if they tried till now." There's bin changes since last you were here, sir. No doubt you've heard as Mr. Chadwick's married a widow lady. It's a sad pity as his son shouldn't behave himself more suitable; it looks so bad for a young gentleman to be always about with such as that young Barchard; and to be seen in the bar of the White Lion every evening almost, with those whose company wouldn't do nobody any good. I'm glad they don't come to my house, and so I am sincerely. Ah, dear! it's time indeed a friendly word was spoken to him.'

Nugent was disappointed at such a report ; he had hoped better things of Allen. However, he expected to find out more in the course of the afternoon, when he was, he knew, to meet the Agra House party at a tennis tournament at Holly Bank. But the chief person in his thoughts just then was certainly not Allen.

He had not been at home in time to put down his name as a player, so he was reduced to look on at the tournament. There was a large gathering, for most of the people in the neighbourhood had come over. The question of partners had been settled in the morning by drawing lots, and the results gave as much satisfaction as they ever do on these occasions, young ladies who had been drawn with indifferent players not always troubling themselves to feign resignation. Mr. Fanshawe arrived late and breathless, in hybrid costume of black upper garments and white flannel trousers. 'So awfully sorry!' he exclaimed to Miss Eddlestone. 'Had a funeral over at Lingmere; you can fancy how ghastly it was for me, thinking all the time you'd be playing without me!' which caused Mr. Liversedge to utter the prediction that that young man would end his career as a bishop. And so the tournament proceeded, with the features characteristic of these social competitions: the talkative young lady who explained exactly why she had or had not taken or missed or left each ball; the humble young man who bungled everything and apologised profusely to a partner who listened with chilling magnanimity and said it really did not matter; there was the casual player, the vicious player, the jocular player (represented on this occasion by Mr. Callebore, who was in great form, enacting an uproarious cockney). 'Another vegetarian!' he would yell, as a ball disappeared in a flower-bed. 'It's the young lady's turn to 'it the ball. Oh, it's astronomy this time!' as the ball soared into the sky. 'I hate letting these affairs get too stiff,' he remarked later, in self-justification, 'and I do flatter myself that if I am nothing else I am rather a good buffoon.'

Nugent had no opportunity as yet of speaking to Margot, who was playing on one of the courts. He had to be contented with watching her as she moved in her pretty cream-tinted tennis costume, and admiring the grace and decision with which she placed her balls. She seemed to have got back her old light-heartedness and animation, and to be the girl he had met on the Trouville shore last summer. Whatever cares she had were sitting lightly on her just now.

Her adversaries were Joceline Hotham and young Stannion, the Admiral's son, whose red and white 'blazer' with the army button showed that he was not long from Sandhurst. The contest was close, as the sides were nearly equal, though Margot's partner, Fanshawe, was not always to be depended upon; she had set her heart on winning, being, perhaps, further incited by the calm manner in which Miss Hotham ignored her existence. For a long time the victory wavered, but at last a skilfully delivered serve of Margot's decided game and set in her favour. Then, to her sur-

prise, Miss Hotham showed herself disposed to be gracious, and came to meet her conqueror. 'I've been wondering,' she said, 'whether you ever meant to know me again or not, because, unless I'm mistaken, we were at school together.'

'I thought you had forgotten,' said Margot.

'Ah, well,' said Joceline, 'I suppose neither of us liked to be the first. I'm coming over to see you some day, and have a talk over old times. How well you play tennis! I get so little practice at home now, with a brother at Oxford. That's the boring part of having a brother at a University, you know—one never sees him.'

'Doesn't one?' said Margot. 'I thought they had vacations and all that.'

'Oh, they do—but then they're always away on reading parties, or "stopping up," as they call it, or visiting, or something. I know I don't see Guy—oh, not once in six months, and then only for a few days! Here, little pink girl, just run and get me my gloves and sunshade, will you? My mother has them.'

'I don't know your mother, or your gloves, or your sunshade,' said Lettice, who was deeply offended at this allusion to her frock.

'Oh, I thought everyone about here knew mamma—never mind, I'll go myself,' and Miss Joceline fluttered across, leaving Margot to her reflections. She was not ill-pleased that Miss Hotham's *hauteur* had turned out to be more or less imaginary, but it was not that which occupied her mind just then. She was thinking still, when she turned and saw Nugent Orme standing before her.

CHAPTER VI.

MARGOT ASKS ADVICE AND RECEIVES IT.

Till then her lovely eyes maintain
Their pure, unwavering, deep disdain.

Matthew Arnold.

MARGOT had known beforehand that Nugent Orme would be at Holly Bank that afternoon, and was aware of his presence almost as soon as he appeared on the lawn. For the pleasure it gave her she was less prepared; she was conscious of looking her best just then, glad that he should find her holding her own in Gorsecombe society; but that did not entirely account for the happiness she felt when they actually met.

She had forgotten—or had she never really noticed till then?—the mingled power and gentleness of his face, with its smiling grey eyes and square chin; even in the sound of his voice there was something pleasantly familiar. She was flattered and touched by the satisfaction it was not difficult to read in his expression. They

were alone for the moment. Lettice had run off, and the general attention was concentrated on an exciting rally which was in progress on the more distant court. There was a garden-bench in a secluded angle of the shrubbery, and they could talk there without fear of being interrupted.

‘And so,’ said Margot, as she took her seat with a little sigh of luxurious relief, ‘we have turned out to be near neighbours—it seemed unlikely enough at Trouville, didn’t it? Do you know that your sister and I have sworn undying friendship already?’

‘She was telling me so last night. I am very glad. I hoped you would be friends. And you don’t regret Chiswick too bitterly?’

‘It is no use regretting—though I do sometimes; you know home never can be quite the same thing now.’

‘I know,’ he said simply.

‘Of course one gets used to most things. I don’t want you to think I am complaining, but you can understand it is—well, a little trying sometimes. I make the best of it. I do indeed.’

‘I am sure you do. I have not seen my old pupil, Allen, here this afternoon.’

Her lip took its old disdainful curve. ‘Allen?’ she said, raising her eyebrows. ‘Oh, no, he would be rather out of his element here; he prefers very different company. He has no taste for civilised society, though that is fortunate, perhaps.’

‘I am sorry,’ he said slowly. ‘I had hoped that he would improve under—under better influences.’

‘You were always rather an optimist about him. If there are better influences I’m afraid he doesn’t appreciate them.’

She was silent for a while, and sat spreading and shutting her hand in the restless manner he remembered; then she turned to him suddenly. ‘I’ve been thinking,’ she said slowly. ‘Wouldn’t it be a good thing for him if he went to college? He is not too old?’

‘Too old? No, I have seen grey-headed undergraduates with a wife and family, for that matter—but I am not at all sure that Allen would be the better for going to a University.’

‘Why?’ she said a little shortly. ‘I thought you would be sure to agree!’

‘Well, you see, he’s not naturally clever; he’s had next to no education; he isn’t athletic—he might get into a bad set there.’

‘It couldn’t possibly be worse than the set he has in the village,’ she replied; ‘I should have thought even the worse kind of undergraduates would be better for him than village boors who are not gentlemen in any sense of the word. And why should he not make some friends who would do him good— isn’t college a place for that?’

‘There is one objection at the outset,’ he said. ‘Most colleges, if not all, have an entrance examination—matriculation it is called—before you can join them; it is not difficult, to be sure, in most cases, but, simple as it is, I doubt whether he could pass it now.’

'If it is simple,' she said, 'he could be coached for it—no one is too dull to be coached; you are making difficulties, Mr. Orme! Oh, how I wish I could make you see that it is the best thing for him—he really can't be allowed to go on like this, it is too dreadful to see it!'

She spoke eagerly, almost passionately, from the desire she felt to escape from the constant burden of her step-brother's presence, which had begun to react upon her nerves. It was not that he was actively aggressive or offensive—he was not even in the house for the greater part of the day; but stories, often exaggerated, reached her of the habits he had fallen into—of his driving, drinking, and betting with low associates—which increased her original repulsion. When he was at home she was troubled by the sight of him sitting, mute for the most part, and unnoticed, except when his father made him the butt of some savage satire. She resented the stolid misery and abasement in his face, and it oppressed her to feel that his eyes were constantly following her movements. She felt him, in short, as an embodied reproach, protesting dumbly against an aversion which she could not and did not wish to overcome.

Margot was a little provoked at Orme's opposition; she had counted upon his assistance to her scheme, which, suggested within the last few minutes by Joceline Hotham's remark, had already matured until she was firmly convinced of its advantages.

Orme naturally saw nothing but the eagerness, which, as he put it down to the best and purest motives, only increased his admiration for her; but he knew Allen too well to believe that he would gain anything but harm from a University career, and not even Margot's pretty impetuosity could lead him to take her view.

'So you won't speak to my step-father?' she said at last, after exhausting her arguments. 'I know he has a great respect for your opinion.'

'If I spoke I should advise him against it,' he said; 'it would only end in fresh disappointment. It is so good and kind of you to be so anxious that he should have a chance of doing better, but I can't honestly approve of your plan, and it's better to tell you so at once.'

Margot was absently tracing the network of her racket with one supple forefinger; her eyes had a touch of compunction in them as she raised them at last. 'You think me better than I am,' she said a little defiantly, in spite of her eyes. 'I don't pretend to be a quite unselfish person, Mr. Orme. I still believe Allen would be better at college, but it is not entirely on his own account that I want him to go. It would be such a relief if he were to be away sometimes! He is only uncomfortable at home, and he makes us all uncomfortable too. Well, I must bear it, I suppose, as you are evidently against me. Please don't mention my poor plan to anybody. I want you to promise me that?'

'Certainly,' he said, 'There is no necessity to say anything about it now that it is given up.'

‘Of course not,’ she said hastily, and just then their *tête-à-tête* was broken in upon by Mrs. Eddlestone with the news that Margot was wanted to play off the final set at once, and that Mr. Fanshawe was looking for her everywhere.

‘Isn’t she a dear?’ exclaimed Mrs. Eddlestone, as if she quite expected Orme to assent. ‘Dottie and Pussie and Fay perfectly rave about her. Such a sweet disposition! Now do come and be introduced to her mother, she’s quite somebody to know.’ Orme was led up to Mrs. Chadwick, who was on the lawn, and disposed to be more gracious than on their first acquaintance, for she had observed that the vicar’s son was not a person to be snubbed. ‘We are having a few friends to dinner to-morrow,’ she said in the course of the conversation, ‘could you forgive such a very short notice and come too? We shall be so delighted to see someone who recalls dear Trouville—do say “Yes,” if you possibly can!’

Orme said ‘Yes’ with some alacrity, and the remainder of the afternoon passed without his being able to gain more than a word or two at parting from Miss Chevening. He walked home in a sort of glamour, possessed by the thought of her. In spite of her disclaimer, he believed that there was little of real selfishness in her nature. She was sorry at heart, he felt certain, for that unhappy Allen—anxious for his improvement; and how submissively she had renounced her plan when he had shown her the objections to it! Perhaps, after all, he had been wrong in opposing it; perhaps—but here his speculations were cut short by meeting the subject of them. Allen was certainly altered for the worse; there was a sullen bravado in his manner; he avoided meeting Nugent’s eyes, and seemed in a hurry to escape. Orme was involuntarily repelled for the moment, but pity prevailed; if the poor fellow was taking to bad courses he might still be saved; there was a look of unhappiness about him that touched Nugent.

‘No,’ said Allen, in answer to his question, ‘you didn’t see me at Holly Bank, not likely. I keep clear of that kind of start, I do. And another thing, I wasn’t asked.’

‘Well, look here—come home with me now and have some dinner. I can send up to Agra House and let them know where you are. My people will be delighted.’

‘A lot they’ll care at home where I am!’ said Allen; ‘but I won’t come, all the same, Orme. I—I promised some chaps I’d look in some time.’

‘That’s nonsense!’ said Orme. ‘Come, you won’t refuse to give me an evening. I shan’t let you off.’

Allen submitted at last to be carried off to the Vicarage, where Millicent at least understood her brother’s motives, and did her best to make the visitor feel that he was welcome and at home. The dinner passed off rather stiffly at first. Allen was shy and suspicious, and the vicar was lazily and rather condescendingly kind; his wife put on her stateliest airs, and the chief burden of the conversation was borne by the brother and sister, as Allen

could not be induced to utter more than monosyllables. But gradually he got over his *mauvaise honte*, and after dinner, when Millicent was taking him round the garden, he showed signs of recognising her efforts to win his confidence. He made her feel uncomfortable indeed at last by his almost abject gratitude. She sought in her embarrassment to interest him in the village concert that was to come off shortly, and even appealed to him for the name of anyone he might know who would be likely to help—an innocent piece of flattery which gave him an unfamiliar sense of importance. It was the happiest evening he had passed for some time, and he was pressed at leaving to come again, with a sincerity that sent him away with a feeling that there was at least one place besides the White Lion or the Barchards' abode where he could count upon a friendly reception. Nugent walked up to the house with him, and took the opportunity to ask him if there was any truth in the rumours he had heard. Allen admitted that he had been in the habit of passing his evenings lately in one of the village inns, and even that he had dropped money at betting. 'Only in a small way, Orme,' he said, 'and the guv'nor pays my allowance regular enough, so I keep right. And the company are quite respectable—they always treat me like a gentleman. You may say what you like, but I must have some sort of society!'

'I'm not going to preach, my dear fellow,' said Orme, 'but you heard what the mother and Millicent said just now. You've always the Vicarage to come to. Remember that. I shall see you to-morrow at dinner, if not before—Mrs. Chadwick asked me this afternoon.'

'I suppose I shall be dining too,' said Allen; 'and, Orme, if you get a chance, say a good word for me to—to her. Tell her I'm not such a downright bad chap as she thinks.'

'I don't believe she does think anything of the sort,' said Orme. 'I do know she's distressed by knowing that you are in such indifferent company—let her see you mean to drop it.'

'She don't care much,' said Allen; 'at least, I wish I was surer she did—but I'll keep steadier, Orme.' And so they parted—Orme to walk back, feeling more hopeful of Allen's future.

Allen found the house locked up for the night, and the door was unfastened by his father, who was fuming. 'I'm not going to have my servants kept up late to let you in from whatever pot-house you've given the honour of your company to. Another time I'm hanged if I'll sit up myself—mind that!'

'I didn't know it was late,' said Allen. 'I've only been——'

'Don't tell *me* where you've been! I want no more lying. I've got my eyes pretty well open by this time. Hold your tongue now, and be off to your bedroom.'

Allen obeyed. His father would not believe him if he spoke, and, after all, it did not matter—he was growing accustomed now to being stormed at.

When Nugent entered the drawing-room at Agra House the

next evening he found the other guests assembled, mostly people he knew, and the few minutes before dinner were taken up in exchanging greetings and recognitions. He had just a careless word and a smile from Margot, and was sent in with one of the latest arrivals, whom he had not met before, an immature young lady whose conversation was restricted to replying 'Yes,' 'No,' and 'Fancy!' alternately, with the air of a startled rabbit, which reduced him at last to studying the company.

There was old Rear-Admiral Stannion, bluff, outspoken, and kindly, with his wife; Mr. and Mrs. Callebore; young Maltby, the brewer's son; the leading doctor and his wife, and others—not a very formidable gathering in any way, though Chadwick did not seem at ease in his place at the head of the table, it seemed to Nugent.

Such efforts as he made to entertain his guests on either hand chiefly took the form of cross-questioning them on local subjects. 'Now, how far do you call it from where you live to Gorsecombe? What distance do you make it from your place to Closeborough? Who's got that big place before you come to the cross-roads on Frogley Heath? How long have they had it?' Orme heard him inquiring, without apparently paying much attention to the answers he received.

Margot was seated some distance down on the opposite side; she wore a dress of some delicate shimmering material of palest green, against which the full white throat and slender neck seemed fairer still as she inclined her head with her usual air of stately submission to the conversation of her neighbour, a stout little man who was holding forth on the number of unlet farms in the district, and the difficulty of satisfying tenants.

Allen, Nugent observed, was absent after all, though no one else took any notice of that circumstance.

Only the sight of Margot kept that dinner from being a weariness to Nugent, who had to divide himself between the duties of following Mrs. Callebore's limp commonplaces and endeavouring in vain to get the startled-rabbit young lady to depart from her little formula.

When the men were left alone, Chadwick moved to the other end, next to the Admiral, who at once began to tackle him on the question of some barbed wire he had put up along his boundaries, whereupon Chadwick showed symptoms of losing his temper.

'They're all at me about it,' he was saying. 'Hang it all, Admiral, what business is it of anybody's? Cruel to children and dogs! Let 'em keep out of my land, then—it's not much to ask. I've had that wire put up, and it shall stay up!'

'Well,' said the Admiral, 'all I can tell you is that if you insist on keeping such an abominable invention—an infernal thing that'll kill all sport if it's allowed to spread—you'll make yourself devilish unpopular with the county, that's all.'

'Do you think I don't know,' said Chadwick, who had had

quite enough wine, 'that if it wasn't for my wife it would be long enough before I saw the inside of any house but my own? Popularity's her business. I mean to manage my own property my own way, and if anybody don't like it they must do the other thing—no offence to you, Admiral!'

The Admiral was only restrained by his disgust from very plain speaking indeed, and the proposition to adjourn to the drawing-room came as a relief to all.

It was some time before Nugent could find any opportunity of approaching Margot. She was the centre of a small group in the further drawing-room, and he had to exercise patience for some time; but the people who had some distance to go began to take their leave first, and in the general move that followed he found himself near her.

'Are you going too?' she said. 'You have not a long drive before you.'

'I am not going until I have had a few minutes' talk with you—if you will let me.'

'Why, of course, there has been no opportunity till now, has there? Sit down there, it is quite early!' He took the seat she indicated, and she sat down on a couch under a lamp, looking at him with unsuspicious and innocent eyes, which made it difficult for him to begin.

'I wanted to speak to you,' he said at last, 'about—about Allen.'

She made a little piteous grimace. '*Must* we really speak about Allen?' she said. 'If you only knew how I want to be amused just now!'

'I hope what I am going to say will not amuse you. Since we met yesterday, I have seen him, and learnt a good deal about his position in this house. I thought I should have seen him here to-night.'

'I'm sorry you were disappointed. There was no room for him at the table, I suppose, but I can assure you that the conversation did not suffer very much from his absence.'

'Yesterday afternoon you seemed anxious to keep him from bad company—you speak indifferently enough now.'

'You would have nothing to say to my plan, and it is hopeless to keep him out of mischief while he is living here. Why should I trouble myself with what he does and where he goes? I wish he could manage to tear himself away from his favourite haunts a little earlier, that is all, and then there would not be a scene when he comes in, as there was last night.'

'You think he was at his favourite haunts last night?'

'He was at some horrid place, or he would not have been so late.'

'I hope you don't consider the Vicarage comes under that description, because that is where he really was—I walked up with him to the gates.'

'Oh!' said Margot. 'Then I suppose I ought to apologise. How noble of you to have him!'

'From what he said, I'm afraid he is not much encouraged to spend his evenings at home.'

'Well, no; but it is quite his own fault. His father would not have forbidden him to come into the drawing-room if he had not behaved roughly to my little sister Lettice, though he was thoroughly disgusted with him long before that. And, as for Allen, I really think he is happier left to his own devices. He does not care to be with us—in fact, I almost believe he dislikes us all for being here, as if we could help it!'

'You are mistaken,' said Orme earnestly; 'you are indeed—you would not say so if you had any idea how deeply he feels being practically excluded and kept at a distance.'

'I so much prefer him at a distance.'

'And, provided that he is kept out of your way, you are careless what pain it may cause him, what temptations he may be exposed to? Miss Chevening, you do not really mean that?'

'I don't want him to be pained or tempted,' she said uneasily; 'but how can I help it?'

'Surely you could interfere if you would? You could use your influence to have him re-admitted to this room, you could show him a little encouragement, a little sympathy, now and then? If he is cut off from any real association with home life, can you wonder if he is driven to find amusement when he can, or if he loses all self-respect and grows reckless? Things are not very bad as yet: a very little sacrifice of your private prejudices will save him—and you will not even make an effort!'

She was listening with lowered eyes, her chin resting in her palm, a certain lingering rebelliousness (for, as we know, Miss Chevening was not inclined to be very submissive while her faults were being pointed out) in the corners of her mouth. She made no answer.

'I have offended you?' he said. 'I dare say you think I have no business to say all this. Perhaps I am only boring you. I can't help it—one must be a bore sometimes when one is in earnest about a thing. I'm in earnest now. I want this poor fellow to have a fair chance of keeping straight in future. Think whatever you choose about me, only try to make things easier for him—you will never regret it!'

She shot a swift glance under her lashes at him as he sat there, forgetful of everything just then but the cause he was pleading; she was not angry, only troubled now by a dim sense of the mastery which, evidently without suspecting it, he was beginning to exert over her will. She disliked Allen as deeply as ever, she did not wish him to frequent the drawing-room as before; she felt little real sympathy for him—but she was anxious to make even this sacrifice rather than lose Nugent's good opinion.

'I don't think you are a bore at all,' she said. 'I think you

make a good advocate. And—and I *will* try to treat him differently. I will speak to mother about it—does that make you any happier?’

‘Much,’ he said, his face brightening. ‘You will be better than your word, I am sure.’

‘Don’t be too sure!’ she said gravely. ‘My good fits never last very long. But I *am* sorry if I have been unjust to him. I will try to be kinder, only I don’t think you at all know what an effort it will be!’

‘So long as you make it!’ he said as he rose. ‘And—you do forgive me for speaking like this?’ he added. ‘I felt I must.’

‘Not for the first time!’ she said, smiling; ‘but I forgive you. I don’t like being scolded, but I suppose I deserve it—you see what a state of meekness you have reduced me to!’

‘I knew she was not really hard-hearted,’ he was thinking as he went away that evening. ‘She feels more than she cares to show. I made no mistake in appealing to her. How lovely she looked under that lamp! It’s just as well I have only a few days to be here, or else—pshaw! What is the use of being a humbug about it—I *am* in love with her, have been ever since I met her first, but I might as well cry for the moon. Long before I have made money enough to think of telling her, she will have married some fellow in the county. Not that she would be likely to care for me in any case. Well, I’ve done Allen a good turn at any rate!’

CHAPTER VII.

CARELESS CLEMENCY.

She is too kind to be cruel, and too haughty not to pardon
Such a man as I—’twere something to be level to her hate.

Lady Geraldine’s Courtship.

AFTER having invited Nugent Orme to dinner, Mrs. Chadwick had made the discovery that it would ‘quite put out her table’ if Allen were to be one of the party, and to conciliate this fastidious piece of furniture he was given to understand that he was expected to absent himself.

So, while the dinner party was in progress, he had his dinner brought in to him in the study by Susan, more ostentatiously sympathetic than ever, and ate it alone, to the sound of distant laughter and talk from the dining-room. But, to tell the truth, he was far from thinking this a hardship—he hated dinner parties, never knowing either what to talk about or how to eat at them, and now there was the fresh terror that his father might attack him publicly and expose him to general derision.

‘I made Masterman give me some champagne for you, Mr.

Allen,' said Susan; 'all he could spare, and he didn't let me have *that* without a grumble. I do call it a shame and a scandal, if I was to lose my place the next minute—you to be sent out to dine alone, as if you wasn't good enough for the rest of them!'

'I don't care, Susan. I'd rather eat here than with all those people, for that matter. I don't have to think every minute how I'm behaving.'

'Ah,' said Susan, 'you're one of the soft-shelled kind—you let yourself be put upon, so it's no wonder you're took advantage of. But before I'd see myself stood aside to please that high and mighty Miss Margot——'

'She had nothing to do with it, so you're mistaken there, Susan!'

'P'raps I don't know what I'm talking about, but it so happens that I do. She's as artful as a cockatress, for all her big, innocent eyes, and her face as she thinks so pretty. You'd ha' bin back in the droring-room long ago if it hadn't been for her—it's her as don't think you fit to enter her gracious comp'ny, so make no mistake!'

After Susan had gone, Allen sat pondering—was it true? He couldn't believe it, and yet, if it should be! He had clung so long to the hope that, in a way, she was not ill-disposed towards him, that in time they would become friends—what if he had to contend with a concealed, deep-rooted dislike that nothing he could do would ever soften? For the moment he felt inclined to give up all his good resolutions, to go out and seek the only solace open to him, but the thought of Millicent and the Vicarage prevailed. He would stay quietly at home that evening, and give no handle for fresh complaint. So he lit his pipe and, finding a volume of an illustrated weekly paper, he turned over the pages until he gradually dropped off to sleep.

He opened his eyes to find Margot standing before him in the radius of the lamplight, and stared stupidly at first, under the impression he was dreaming still, such a resplendent and visionary being did she seem just then in her dainty evening frock.

She had to conquer a rising disgust; his appearance just then, in his old tweed coat and dishevelled drowsiness, was not inviting; the dinner had not been removed, and the room was heavy with the fumes of food and stale tobacco, which offended her senses—she drew her own conclusions from the empty champagne bottle on the tray. 'This is the interesting penitent Mr. Orme is so anxious I should help!' she thought to herself, with a bitter little smile. All this gave a little severity to her tone when she spoke. 'Allen, do you know that it is quite late? All the people have gone.'

'Have they?' he said; he was awake now, and Susan's words had returned to him. 'Well, Margot, I've kept out of their way, and yours—you ought to be satisfied!'

She saw that his brain was clear enough, and spoke more

gently. 'Have I ever said that I wished you to keep out of my way?' It was about that very thing that I came to find you. I have been speaking to your father just now, and he says he never meant to banish you from the drawing-room altogether, and—and mother hopes you will come in every evening as you used to do.'

'Margot,' he said huskily, 'you've done all this for me—and when I'd been fancying—oh, I'll never forget this, ask me to do anything for you—I don't care what, and I'll do it, I will! I'm not an ungrateful chap!'

He tried to seize the pendent hand which was near him, but she drew back instinctively. 'Ask you to do something?' she said lightly, 'well, then, I ask you not to sit up any longer just now.'

He went to his room with a heart swelling with adoring gratitude. Never again would he believe Susan's insinuations; so far from hating him and wishing to keep him away, Margot had actually condescended to intercede for him, to get him permission to be more often in her society! How could he ever do enough for her?

On the following Sunday Orme met Margot in the churchyard after service and walked home by her side. 'Allen has told me how good you have been,' he said. 'It was like you!'

The evident approval and admiration in his face gave her a thrill of pleasure; she liked him to believe in her in this way, it almost reconciled her to Allen.

'You seem to forget,' she said, 'that it was your own suggestion.'

'You were the only person able to carry it out, and now, thanks to you, he is put on his feet again. I don't think you will ever regret what you did.'

'Oh, but I do,' she said with her light laugh. 'Don't look disgusted; I only meant that effusive gratitude is rather a bore. I never was meant to be a patron saint, and it makes me feel so very absurd.'

'You take a delight in pretending to have no sympathy,' he said. 'I know you better now.'

'Do you?' she replied a little sadly. 'Ah, I wish I knew myself!'

Nugent, in the course of a second visit to Agra House, was able to see that Allen's position in the family was very much improved already. Margot's example had had its influence even on Chadwick. There was a spice of mockery, perhaps, in her complaisant acceptance of Allen's crude attempts to join in the conversation, but it was not ill-natured, and on several occasions he noticed that she interposed on his behalf—it touched him to see the evident gratitude Allen felt for her protection, and the increase it made in his self-respect. He was more convinced than ever of the sweetness and goodness that underlay Miss Chevening's surface pride and waywardness.

And Margot was trying hard to conquer her deep-seated prejudices, though, perhaps without her knowledge, she was impelled by Orme's presence to conform for the time to the ideal she knew he had of her, as we sometimes unconsciously do when in the company of those who, as we may be aware, take us to be better or worse than we really are.

So Allen had no excuse and no desire now for spending his evenings in Barchard's society; he was often at the Vicarage, where he had a firm friend in Millicent, who employed him, to his delight, in helping in the preparations for the village concert now close at hand. He came over on the morning of the day to inform her complacently that he had engaged a friend of his at Closeborough to come over and sing—a rattling clever chap—and Allen himself would accompany him on the banjo. Millicent did not like to decline this offer, for fear of hurting his feelings, as he was evidently much in earnest about it. 'I've told the schoolmaster' (who was in charge of the entertainment), 'and he says it'll be all right; and I say, Miss Orme, don't tell Margot, she don't know I can play the banjo, and I want to surprise her, you see?'

Privately, Millicent doubted whether this accomplishment would excite any rapturous amount of astonishment in Miss Chevening, but she was glad to see this young man interested in anything, and was too kindly in nature to discourage him. The Ormes were popular in the neighbourhood, which caused a number of people to drive in for the concert who would much rather have stayed away. There were others who grumbled at having to dine early, and others still who, professing to think the whole affair a horrid bore, looked forward to it secretly as a social event. At this time of the year life in the country, especially for those who are pining for the London season, is not so full of incident as to prevent even a village concert from being a dissipation in its way, and the pretty Gorsecombe school-rooms were crowded that evening with an audience, afterwards described by the *Pineshire Telegraph*, with an emphasis intended to be complimentary, as 'one to which, in point both of brilliancy and fashion, we can recall none inferior.'

In the front seats were 'the gentry': Sir Everard and Lady Adela—he in a grumpy condition from his early dinner and drive, she with a set determination on her face to be pleased with everything beforehand; Miss Hotham, exchanging little handshakes over backs of chairs and across benches, and peering about through a pair of eye-glasses she put up from time to time; the old Admiral and his party; Liversedge, rendered more caustic than usual by dyspeptic conditions; the Eddlestons, the Chadwicks, and, in short, *le tout Gorsecombe*, as a young man who had spent his last Easter in Paris remarked at the time. Behind came the farmers, the local miller, the chemist, and representatives of village trade generally; then the cottagers and the labourers; and at the extreme back, on raised seats, pot-hatted, red-faced, brilliant in green and orange neckties, and emphatic in the matter of boots, tho

hobble-de-hoydom of that village and one or two adjoining it had assembled. In spite of the mottoes and decorations, the interior had the severity, partly scholastic, partly ecclesiastical, characteristic of such places, with the drab walls, the educational diagrams, the black, glistening squares of the windows. The atmosphere was somewhat strongly agricultural, though dominated by the paraffin lamps.

The programme was as varied as usual. The choir children huddled together on the platform with wondering round eyes, and sang nursery quadrilles under Millicent's direction. Then the village butcher roared a bass song in praise of cricket, with no discoverable tune in it, after which Miss Pussie Eddlestone recited 'Maud Muller' as young ladies generally do recite this favourite piece—that is, with a lingering tenderness on all the least important words. The amount of pathos she threw into the 'small tin cup' was remarkable as an instance of misdirected energy, and she did considerably more than justice to the 'innocent surprise' of Miss Muller's eyes. As a second piece, she gave a piece of anonymous American sentiment called 'Pappa's Letter,' and the more impressionable part of Gorsecombe wept profusely over the little boy whose mother pasted a stamp in sport amid the waves of golden light on her little boy's forehead, and who was run over by a waggon and killed in consequence. 'She has so much feeling!' Mrs. Eddlestone whispered, beaming with complacency. 'Dear Pussie, she will be dreadfully knocked up to-morrow!' As a corrective there came a comic conjuring entertainment by Mr. Calembore, and after that Mr. Fanshawe sang a Bedouin love-song, the effect of which was a little marred by his accompanist handing him between the verses one of the candles from the piano to be re-lighted. The poor curate, too flurried to understand this, stood clasping the candlestick throughout the next verse, thereby destroying much of the effect of its passionate refrain—

Till the stars grow o-old!
And the moon is co-old!

However, Gorsecombe saw nothing ridiculous about it, so it was of no consequence. Then Margot's turn came; she had chosen the pretty old ballad of 'Barbara Allen.' Her clear sweet voice made every line tell. She might have been Barbara herself, careless, perverse, incredulous, as she came to the scene by the death-bed, with such brilliant heartlessness did the cruel little speeches fall from her lips. One at least of her hearers felt a strange pain as he listened, as if it were real, and he compelled to witness her cruelty. For the moment, as she stood there in her proud young beauty, her face partly in shadow, and the light from the rather smoky little metal lamps behind falling softly on the outline of her dusky crown, Nugent Orme was wondering if this strangely bewitching girl belied her real nature as much as he had tried to believe. But she sang the last verses with a tenderness that re-

assured him, that for the rest of the audience turned the current of sympathy back again to remorseful Barbara dying of her tardily awakened passion. There was a little hush as her voice died away at the end, and then came a storm of applause. She had to sing again before she could return to her seat at her mother's side, and soon a little folded paper was passed to her. It was from Joceline Hotham. 'Don't run away before the end,' she read, 'Mamma is so anxious to know you. How delightfully you sing!'

Mrs. Chadwick read the note too, and with an elation she found it hard to repress. The Hothams were the people she had most desired to know, the only people who had taken no notice of her. Lady Adela was evidently attracted by Margot; this introduction could hardly fail to lead to an acquaintance sooner or later. With Hawleigh Court open to her, Mrs. Chadwick felt that she could more easily bear all that she found disagreeable in her home life. She handed the note back to her daughter. 'I've no doubt we shall meet them as we come out,' she said, with a voice that tried to be unconcerned.

The entertainment proceeded with a reading by a literary young carpenter, who selected the chapter on the condemned cell from 'Sketches by Boz,' a work which he had recently discovered at the Book Club. He read with much power, dwelling with harrowing force upon the 'h' in each hour that remained to the unhappy convict. Then the schoolmaster, who conducted the proceedings, announced 'A comic song by Mr. Bilkins, accompanied by Mr. Allen Chadwick—not on the programme.'

Mrs. Chadwick glanced interrogatively at Margot, who returned the look by one of amused disclaimer. But amusement turned to dismay when Allen and his friend appeared on the platform arrayed in the costume of what used to be known as 'Ethiopian serenaders.' Poor Allen sneaked in, looking miserable under his lamp-black, and began to try the strings of his banjo with hot, limp fingers, evidently unaware that it was out of tune. Mr. Bilkins was a rather rowdy young solicitor's clerk from Closeborough, whose acquaintance Allen had made at the bar of the 'Crown' in that city; he swaggered on with perfect ease, and began a dialogue in the dialect of the stage nigger with Allen, who supported him very indifferently. The dialogue and the little mannerisms in which Bilkins indulged were by no means in the best taste, and a kind of shiver began to run through the front benches before many sentences were exchanged. The fact was that Bilkins had been stimulated by Bob Barchard (who was actuated partly by love of mischief and partly by finding Allen less disposed for his society) 'not to mind the swells and make it as lively as he could.' Allen's own part was confined to thrumming a simple accompaniment and walking round his chair between the verses, and, though his own taste was none of the most refined, he was struck himself by the unsuitability of some of the verses to that audience—they had never sounded quite so vulgar before. He felt more and more uncomfortable, in

spite of the frantic applause from the back benches, but he could not back out of it now. It was fortunate for him that he could see no one in the audience at all distinctly, or the kind of scandalised bristle observable in some quarters would not have rendered him more at his ease. Chadwick alone in the front seats was amused by the performance; he was delighted, even with Allen. 'He's really not bad,' he chuckled to his wife, 'not bad at all. I never thought the fellow had it in him.' Mrs. Chadwick made no reply—she was too angry. That her husband should actually be blind to the enormity of this last outrage was only a fresh proof, if that were needed, of the disparity between them. Margot accepted the exhibition with resigned contempt, she tried to feel that she was not involved in it personally; what was it to her if this wretched boy chose to make a fool of himself publicly? The poor vicar was, after all, the greatest sufferer; a lazy, shy, and kind-hearted man, he did not like to stop the performance unless it became absolutely necessary, and so he sat fidgeting nervously until it was over, and a repetition was being demanded vociferously from the rear. Then he could stand no more, and rose, holding up his hand for silence. 'I think,' he said, 'as our programme is already long, it had better not be interrupted by—by anything that this is hardly a fitting place for. I don't wish to say more, if I am understood.'

'Set o' muffs!' said Bilkins in the retiring-room. 'Why, I had the patter straight from the original nigger who came down to the 'Accordion' staring, and, as for the song, you could sing it to a Sunday-school almost. Well, we made 'em sit up, old fellow!'

'I wish I'd known you were going to sing that one,' said Allen gloomily, 'I could have told you they wouldn't see the jokes in it.'

'It will not be very pleasant,' Margot was saying at the same time to her mother, 'to have to go up and speak to Lady Adela—after this!'

Mrs. Chadwick glanced towards the seats occupied by the Hotham party—they were empty. 'You are spared the ordeal, my dear,' she said, and her face showed how difficult she found it to control her rage and disappointment. 'As I expected, the refined humour of that last performance has been too much for them.'

As Nugent said good-bye to Margot, for he was going up to chambers the next morning, she remarked, 'I suppose even you were surprised at my gifted step-brother's triumph this evening—are you not going to congratulate us?'

'I can't think what possessed him,' he replied with a disgust he could not hide; 'it was a silly, vulgar business. I wish I had known of it beforehand.'

'He is a pleasant person,' she said gravely, 'so full of hidden talents; this evening quite repays me for trying to be good-natured, does it not? Ought I not to feel encouraged to persevere?'

Orme felt rather foolish, and chafed under it. 'I won't say anything—I can't,' he said; 'only I am sorry for him and—and others. Good-bye, Miss Chevening.'

Margot was driving with her mother two or three days after the concert, and the conversation fell, as it often did now, on the intolerable *gêne* of Allen's presence in the drawing-room night after night. 'I don't want to reproach you, sweetest,' said Mrs. Chadwick, 'but I quite counted upon having our evenings at least free from him, and suddenly, for no conceivable reason that I can see, you pleaded for him to come back again. I couldn't oppose it very well, but it was a mistake.'

'It was, dear,' said Margot wearily; 'I admit it. I will never do a disinterested thing again. Oh, that concert!'

'Don't talk of it. I should not be surprised—no, I should not—if people were to suppose *we* were in the secret of that terrible performance of those two creatures!'

'He actually proposed to bring Mr. Bilkins up and introduce him, burnt cork and all, at the end,' said Margot. 'I told him that I might astonish Mr. Bilkins if he dared to do anything of the kind. But surely people will not make us accountable for Allen's behaviour?'

'You saw how the Hothams behaved; depend upon it, this will go all over the county; no one will spoil the story by being too precise about his relationship to us; we shall be fortunate if we are not represented as dancing a family breakdown with blackened faces! And as long as he lives here we shall be in constant dread of being disgraced and humiliated from time to time. How can we expect people to keep up any relations with us? We shall be cut, I know we shall be cut before very long! If his father could only have been induced to send him out just for a year or two, to gain experience on that plantation of his in Bengal, *what* a good thing it would have been!'

'But can't he?'

'I did suggest it. I am sure, for Allen's sake, it would be so wise, but your step-father wouldn't hear of it; he means to sell the plantation, or "concern," as he calls it, as soon as he can; he doesn't care about Allen being a planter, he says. I saw it was useless.'

'Would he send him to college, mother? That would be better than nothing.' Margot recalled, as she spoke, Nugent's strong disapproval of such a course; she knew that she had allowed him to think her convinced by his arguments. But her patience was at an end. Nugent might be mistaken; he had almost acknowledged as much; he could not blame her now for suggesting a plan which most people would consider an admirable arrangement for all concerned. Not that she intended to take any prominent part in the affair; she might leave that to others.

'If your step-father does not mind the expense, that really might be managed. I'm afraid he would not listen to me, though. I must take the vicar into our confidence and coax him to suggest it; it will come so much better from him.'

And, on the first opportunity, Mrs. Chadwick consulted the Rev.

Cyprian Orme on the pain it gave her to see her step-son so unlike other young men. It was not long before the vicar, much to his own surprise, found that he had hit upon the sovereign remedy. 'A University!' Mrs. Chadwick had never thought of that. Why, it was the very thing; how very, very clever of dear Mr. Orme! How she wished she had asked his advice earlier! And *would* he speak to her husband about it? He would—*how* could she thank him!

The good-humoured, easy-going vicar assented readily enough; he thought that if anything could put a little polish on that highly objectionable young man, a course of University life was the most likely to succeed. He was a University man himself, as was his son, and had a strong belief in the value of the training. He was agreeably surprised by Mrs. Chadwick's interest in her step-son; he thought her a very charming and warm-hearted woman. Whether Allen was a fit person to succeed or even hold his own in college society, he did not trouble himself to reflect; in fact, he was soon enamoured of an idea which he was already firmly persuaded was his own.

When he broached the subject to Chadwick, he found him not indisposed to consider it, for Mrs. Chadwick had carefully paved the way beforehand. Chadwick was rather attracted by the idea of sending his son to a University; it went some way to soothe him for past disappointment. 'I thought they had to be sent up young?' he said. 'Allen's not far off his twenty-second birthday; but, if you say it can be managed, why, it might be worth thinking about. How am I to set about it? Can they take him now, and when had he better go?'

This was a point that the vicar declared himself less competent to decide; his own college, Balliol, was unsuitable for obvious reasons. Allen must, he thought, go somewhere where the standard of admission was less exacting. He had lost touch with his Alma Mater of late, and knew little of the present regulations at other colleges. 'I tell you what,' he said, 'I'll get Fanshawe to find out for you; he's not long from Cambridge, and he's sure to know all about it—yes, I'll speak to Fanshawe.'

Having spoken to his curate and transferred the whole responsibility to him, the vicar dismissed the affair from his mind with a good conscience.

Fanshawe warmly recommended his own college. It was small and snug, and stood high in public estimation; he took the opportunity of mentioning some titled and distinguished members, all, it appeared, personal friends of his own, who were up with him. He undertook to make all necessary inquiries at once. 'As for entrance,' he said, 'it isn't much of an exam. They don't make a point of your being a classical or mathematical swell. Of course, if your son has got a trifle rusty in his subjects, he might read up for them between this and October. I know a man who would read with him—ripping clever fellow he was—he'll take care your son gets through.'

Chadwick by this time was bent on making an undergraduate of Allen. He was necessarily dependent on the advice of those who were better acquainted than he with college formalities. The preliminaries were arranged by Fanshawe, who also, with some natural satisfaction at being able to do an old friend a good turn inexpensively, communicated with a Mr. Melladew, a man of his own year and college.

Mr. Melladew, having no better engagement just then, readily accepted the post of resident coach to Allen Chadwick, who saw all these arrangements made for him with bewilderment, and yet a secret expansion. If he really were to go to Cambridge to be a member of an ancient college, like Nugent, would not Margot think more of him when he came back? He was not clever, he knew, but he might succeed at Cambridge; was not Cambridge mathematical, and had he not always had a turn for arithmetic? Buoyed up by hopes of this vague kind, he refrained from raising objections, to which, indeed, his father would have been in no mood to listen with patience.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRIVATE TUITION.

Les personnes faibles ne peuvent être sincères.—*La Rochefoucauld.*

‘HENNIE,’ said Ida suddenly, a day or two after the arrival of the new tutor, ‘will Mr. Melladew stay here long, do you think?’

She and Miss Henderson were alone in the schoolroom together, and Ida was supposed to be occupied in translating Molière.

‘I’m sure I can’t tell you,’ said the governess. ‘We have been at least an hour over this one scene, Ida!’

‘It is such nonsense!’ declared Ida; ‘now *isn’t* it, Hennie? Listen to this: “The Muphti” (chanting and dancing) “Ha la ba, ba la chon, ba la ba, ba la da!” I do think the “Bourgeois Gentil-homme” is the silliest rubbish!’

‘I should not say it was silly, exactly,’ pronounced the governess, with the enlightenment of a superior mind; ‘it is certainly peculiar in parts, but we must always remember, Ida, that popular taste was very different in those days. Every properly-educated girl is expected to have read at least *one* comedy of Molière’s!’

‘If such stuff as this is education!’ said Ida, disgustedly. ‘But don’t let’s begin ha-la-ba-ing again just yet, Hennie; we’ve lots of time. I’m in a talking humour this afternoon. Weren’t you saying something about Mr. Melladew? I think he’s awfully nice, Hennie, don’t you?’

‘He seems to have agreeable manners,’ said the governess.

‘I wonder what his history is,’ pursued Ida, resting her chin

comfortably on her folded hands; I'm sure he has one. His eyes have such a mournful look in them sometimes. Perhaps he has lost all his money, Hennie, and has had to come down to teaching?'

'I am sorry you seem to consider teaching such a degrading occupation.'

'Teaching that horrid Allen is—you poor dear sensitive Hennie. Did you really think I meant anything else? How Mr. Melladew must hate it! He looked so tired when he came into the drawing-room last night; did you notice how white his hands are? I like that lazy way he has, as if it was not worth while to take much trouble about anything. He was talking to you quite a long time; did he tell you much?'

'Really, my dear child, you are very curious to-day—what should he tell me?'

'I mean, did he seem to think he should like being here?'

'It is rather early for him to form any opinion, and he could hardly tell me in any case.'

'No,' said Ida. 'I dare say he has made up his mind not to stop already, though. Did he say anything about—about any of us—about me?'

'Good heavens! no. How could he?'

'He must have thought me a perfect idiot. I said such stupid things when he spoke to me—he made me feel so shy, Hennie. Oh, well, I am going on with this old Molly.' And Ida began to translate monotonously—"*The Muphti comes back, covered with his turban of ceremony, which is of an unmeasurable grossness—size, then—and garnished with candles lighted in four or five ranks*"—What r-o-t it all is. Fancy candles in a turban! Suppose Mr. Melladew were to fall desperately in love with—with Margot?'

'Or with you?' suggested Miss Henderson; 'it is quite as likely!'

'With me!' said Ida. 'Why, I'm only a school-girl to him, Hennie; he won't take any notice of me. I should look quite grown-up, though, if I only had my hair done up like Margot's, instead of this stupid pigtail.' And Ida went to the glass and began to unplat her hair and to twist it up in imitation of Margot's. 'See, Hennie, no one would think me a school-girl if he saw me like this—oh, couldn't you get mother to let me keep it up? It's ever so much more becoming, isn't it now?'

'Vain child!' said Miss Henderson, her light-lashed eyes scrutinising Ida's pretty self-conscious face with a growing interest. 'Do you know that I shall really begin to suspect—'

Ida was upon her in a moment, stopping her mouth with kisses. 'You absurd old Hennie—as if I should be such a goose! Why, of course, I know that's all ridiculous. I should like to know how it feels to have somebody madly in love with one. Isn't it rather amusing—no, not that—*romantic*, Hennie?'

'I can't give any opinion, really,' was the reply, delivered with much primness.

'How proper we are!' laughed Ida. 'As if we haven't talked it over ever so often. Why, you told me yourself you were engaged once, and broke it off.'

'Did I? You see even a poor little governess has moments when she longs for some sympathy. I have known what it is to be loved, Ida, but that is all over now. My heart,' declared Miss Henderson with a sentimental little sigh, 'is a waste; love will never bloom there for me again!'

'You poor darling! But tell me all about it; you never have, you know. What was he called? Was he handsome, was he very much in love? He must have been—you are so pretty, though you *are* twenty-three!'

'You remind me,' said Miss Henderson, 'that, whatever my age is, you at least are too young to understand or to be told about these things.'

'Why, Hennie,' exclaimed Ida, looking aggrieved, 'I'm seventeen, and—and I'm sure we've talked about being in love often enough for me to understand—you *are* unkind to me to-day!'

But although Miss Henderson did not insist upon confining the conversation to Molière, nor even discourage a vein of sentiment which both were pretty well accustomed to pursue, she was not to be drawn into particulars.

While governess and pupil were speculating on love in the abstract, varied, as conscience pricked them from time to time, by spasmodic returns to the classical French comedy, which they were less fitted to appreciate, Mr. Melladew was strolling leisurely down the village on his way to his friend Fanshawe's lodgings.

Adrian Melladew was the kind of young man who might naturally be expected to excite at least a flutter of interest in a romantic school-girl. He was about twenty-four, tall and slim, with dark eyes which he knew how to make expressive, and a mouth that, well-shaped as it was, was not remarkable for firmness. He wore his hair rather long and parted in the middle. He had a pleasant voice and a languid, rather negligent manner. At Cambridge he had played heroines at the A. D. C. with signal success. He had not distinguished himself in any other way, affecting a certain gentle contempt for men who found amusement in violent exercise, and contenting himself with a low second class in the History Tripos. He was popular with the men of his set, played and sang a little, collected blue china, and entertained at his afternoon teas as well as any London hostess. After leaving Cambridge, he had gone up for the Home Civil Service and been appointed to a not over-remunerated post in the Revenue Department, eking out his salary by taking pupils. The monotony and hopelessness of the office had proved too much for him at last; he had thrown up his appointment in despair, and lived as he could by editing school-books, and acting as deputy lecturer for a friend at a ladies' college. The

friend had returned, and, his engagement terminated, Melladew had written to Fanshawe to ask if he knew of anything that would suit him, and this the curate had borne in mind when appealed to by his vicar.

Melladew found out the curate's abode, which was in lodgings in one of the little red-brick, semi-detached villas that even Gorsecombe had not escaped from entirely. There were iron railings in front, and a rhenmatic rustic porch, with a bed of scarlet geraniums, calceolaria, and lobelia neatly enclosed with flints before the little bay-window.

He discovered the curate stretched on a sofa with a novel, in a room whose decorative shortcomings were disguised as much as possible by sundry articles that belonged to his undergraduate existence—the well-known photographic groups, with the college arms and names of members emblazoned below, carved work, shields, and so on. The shabby little sham-marble mantelpiece was draped with embroidered cloth, and college pewters stood on brackets here and there. Altogether the effect was not unlike the cheaper sort of out-college lodgings.

'I could fancy we were back in dear old Cambridge again,' murmured Melladew, as his eye wandered round the room. 'I never expected, though, when we both put on white ties to take our degrees in, that yours would become chronic. You were more coloured than plain in those days, my dear Fanshawe.'

'Had to be a curate, or starve,' was the nonchalant answer. 'Felt rather out of it at first. Never forget my first meeting with old Liversedge. I was crossing his land, and, seeing him, I thought it best to apologise. "Don't apologise," he said, looking like some sort of old goat, "I'm one of your lambs, you know!" I felt a fearful fool. But I'm getting used to it now. They're beginning to see I can sink the parson. And my vicar's a good sort. Now let's hear how you're getting on with these new people.'

Melladew looked slightly troubled as he passed his hand through his hair: 'Why, that's rather what I came to talk to you about. I'm afraid it won't do. I must give it up.'

'Why? You knew what you were letting yourself in for. I told you your pup was rather a boulder, and old Chadwick quite the bear—now didn't I?'

'He is a bear, and the boy's a cub,' said Melladew. 'I can't drive anything into his thick head. He's forgotten all he ever knew, except simple arithmetic, and I'm supposed to teach him algebra, and Latin prose and Greek, and trigonometry, all between this and October—it's hopeless, and I'd better tell them so and go.'

'Bindles, my dear fellow!' was the curate's inelegant comment. 'Sheer bindles.' If he can't learn, that's his affair—all the less work for you! Why should you throw away a chance like this? You won't get such a fee everywhere. Don't tell me you're going to do anything so idiotic!

'There's another reason,' confessed Melladew. 'Personally I should rather like to stay. Mrs. Chadwick's very civil, and the daughters, as far as I have seen, pretty and agreeable and all that——'

'Then, if you'd rather like to stay, what's the objection? Hang me if I can see it!'

'Well,' he said reluctantly, 'did I ever tell you that I was once engaged? It was in my last vac., three years ago now, and there was a girl who used to come and teach my young sister the piano, and I saw a good deal of her, and we corresponded and so on, and I suppose we considered ourselves engaged. Then my people found it out—that was after I came down, and they didn't take to her at all. So the governor put his foot down, and said if I married without his consent he wouldn't give me a penny.'

'A penny would not have gone far,' interjected the curate.

'He had the pull over me, because I owed a lot up at Cambridge. I owe some of it still, and I meant to get him to pay the more pressing fellows. What was I to do, you know? I couldn't marry then, anyhow, so I wrote and broke it off, putting it as gently as I could, and heard no more of it.'

'Well out of it, I should say; but I don't see how——'

'Of course you don't till I come to it. Well, my dear Fanshawe, this girl is the governess to the younger Chevening girls.'

'Whew! That's awkward. What did she do when you met?'

'She didn't do much; she was prepared for it. We met as strangers, but I can see that she hasn't forgotten it, and—and it's not very pleasant for me!' he concluded plaintively.

'Well, as long as she understands that it's all over——'

'But I'm not sure that I *want* it to be all over, and—and I'm afraid she does. We had a long talk the other evening; we had to be very guarded, of course, but she let me see that she thought I'd behaved like a brute, and so I have. She's twice as pretty as she used to be when I knew her, Fanshawe.'

'Why don't you make up to her again, then?' suggested the Rev. Mr. Fanshawe.

'I—I don't like to,' said Melladew, with a slight shiver at the curate's phrase, which seemed to jar on his refined senses. 'She wouldn't stand that sort of thing now, and besides, look at me. Unless anything happens to the governor, and he's good for any number of years, I'm dependent pretty much on what I can make. He'd cut me off, I know he would, if I married without his consent. And she's fond of dress and extravagance even now. I daren't run the risk of making a fool of myself again.'

'Then do as you propose—throw up the pup and bolt,' said the curate yawning.

'I *don't* propose that,' was the reply, somewhat irritably spoken.

'I don't *want* to go if she doesn't make a point of it.'

'Stay, then; you needn't see any more of her than you can

help; there's room enough for both of you. It's nonsense to throw away a good thing unless you're obliged to.'

'So it is,' said Melladew. 'I think you're right, Fanshawe, it would be a pity. And—and I can keep out of her way. I don't want to get her into trouble, poor little girl.'

Perhaps Melladew did not really require much inducement to remain under the roof that sheltered Camilla Henderson. He was fond of confidences, and from his undergraduate days had been in the habit of consulting Fanshawe in affairs of difficulty, often of his own manufacture. So he remained at Agra House, a course which Miss Henderson seemed very far from resenting. The situation gratified her taste for intrigue and mystery. As far as her shallow nature allowed, she had cared for him, and deeply felt his defection; she had a sense of triumph now, in knowing that she might re-establish her power over him if she chose. She intended to punish him a little first, and treated him, when they met, with the most complete indifference, ignoring all his overtures for a reconciliation. By these tactics, however, she effected rather more than she intended. Melladew acquiesced, and began to avoid her, considering this, as he was as powerless to marry as ever, the wiser course. It was; but it did not suit Miss Henderson, who required the excitement of piquing and baffling him, and enjoying his penitent misery. If he would not trust himself near her, the situation would become too stupid; she might forgive him, but she meant him to purge his offence first.

He evidently feared to make the first advances, and, owing to her position in the house, she dared not give him any open encouragement to seek her society. But there was Ida, who was already powerfully attracted by the good-looking young tutor she was ready to accept as an ideal hero of romance. Ida, who had shown such a suspicious interest in the French novel Miss Henderson had selected as a suitable means of improving her accent, '*Le Roman d'un jeune homme pauvre*'—not the work, though unobjectionable in itself, which a most discreet person would have chosen under the circumstances. Ida's ill-regulated mind was quite precociously sentimental enough without a stimulant of this kind. Miss Henderson was not troubled with scruples. She meant no harm, but she worked upon and used Ida's school-girl admiration to further her own purposes. She encouraged her to talk constantly about this interesting young man, to pity his hard lot, his melancholy, while she was careful not to betray any sentiments of her own. 'He looks as if he would be so grateful to be taken more notice of,' she said; 'he watches you so wistfully sometimes when you're playing tennis, dear. Of course I can't interfere, but I don't think your mother would object if you asked him to take more part in our amusements—it would be a real kindness to him.'

Ida needed no pressing; on the first opportunity she timidly and with a beating heart asked Melladew if he would join them at

tennis, and it soon became an ordinary thing for him to meet and accompany them on various expeditions, or in their outdoor occupations, though always in a more or less unpremeditated manner.

Ida generally went out alone with the governess, and, as they did not think it necessary to tell Mrs. Chadwick how often a third person formed one of the party, she saw no reason for retracting her confidence in Miss Henderson. For Ida these meetings were full of a perilous bliss. Melladew treated her with a deference that increased her infatuation. She was only a child in his eyes, but he exerted himself to please and interest her by all his arts. It was all meant for Miss Henderson, who was still maintaining her demure reserve, but the poor child did not know that. He talked to her freely—always about himself, and the trials he had had, and the great things he meant to do some day, dropping hints, when he saw that they were not likely to offend, of the burden he found his present pupil. 'I can't tell you what terribly exhausting work it is,' he would say in his pathetic voice. 'I could not possibly endure it but for intervals of peace and rest like these.'

And Ida felt a deeper indignation against Allen for vexing her hero's soul by his crass stupidity.

'Hennie,' she said one day, 'you don't mind Mr. Melladew's coming with us like this, do you? You were so very stand-off-ish with him this afternoon.'

'I don't mind if it gives you pleasure, darling.'

'You dear, unselfish Hennie! it *does* give me pleasure. He talks so delightfully, and—do you think it is any pleasure to him to come?'

'I think,' said the governess archly, 'you don't require me to tell you that. Where are your eyes, dear?'

'He does seem glad when he meets us.' Ida flushed with a shy pleasure. 'Oh, Hennie! he is so clever and handsome—he can't be glad to see me—and yet, what else *can* it be?'

'Vain little fool!' was the governess's inward comment, but what she said was: 'I must leave you to draw your own conclusions, darling. He does not honour me with much of his notice, does he?'

'That's because you are not very nice to him, Hennie,' said the unsuspecting Ida. 'I'm sure he has a great respect for you; it's only that he finds it easier to talk to me, I suppose. He does talk to you sometimes, too.'

'I must be grateful for small mercies, my dear,' was the answer, with a rather hard little laugh. 'I am perfectly contented.'

'Don't be bitter, Hennie. You don't believe in—in anyone being sincere now, do you? But I'm sure Mr. Melladew would be; he wouldn't say things he didn't mean, like that horrid wretch who treated you so badly!'

'If you have any love for your poor Hennie,' that young lady entreated quickly, 'don't talk to me of—of him. I hope Mr. Melladew will turn out a very different kind of person!'

Upon the whole Allen was becoming reconciled to entering University life, though at first he had been very decidedly averse to leaving home. He did not want to go away from where Margot was, especially now that she was beginning to be less distant and abrupt with him. If Cambridge men were like Melladew (whom he loathed), he thought he should not be very happy at college. But he saw that he stood a little higher in his father's estimation than since his disgrace. Chadwick had caught eagerly enough at the idea of making his son an undergraduate; he had exaggerated notions of the social importance it would bring him to be able to talk of 'his boy at college,' and what it cost him to keep him there, and then his conscience was eased by repairing his early neglect. He even came to believe that, in some unformulated way, Allen would distinguish himself and be a credit to him yet. So, though he never completely recovered his former confidence, he was more genial in his manner to the boy.

In fact, the prospect of being shortly relieved from his presence had worked a wonderful improvement in the family attitude to him; particularly as he was closeted for several hours in the day with the tutor, who gave a favourable report of his industry. 'How is he getting on, hey?' Chadwick would ask at luncheon. 'Making a scholar out of him?'

'I think,' Melladew would answer, 'he ought to have no difficulty in passing in, sir.'

'Pass in—no. Why, they tell me that's a mere nothing at most colleges; but you'll have to work when you *are* in, Allen, mind that!'

But the subjects, though presenting no difficulty to anyone who had passed through the ordinary routine of a public school, seemed to Allen as impossible as the tasks set by some wicked witch in the fairy tales. How was he, with an education of the plainest commercial order, and a very imperfect recollection of that, to acquire in four months a working knowledge of two ancient languages, to construe Tacitus and Aristophanes, and turn passages of colloquial English into neat and elegant Greek or Latin prose? He tried in vain to grapple with the mysteries of the Eton Latin Primer and the Greek Grammar; his brain was dulled by hopeless attempts to master the simplest propositions of Euclid, or even the meaning and value of the algebraic signs.

'It's no use, Mr. Melladew,' he said one day; 'it's all a muddle to me, and so I tell you straight, I shall never learn all this rot.'

'I'm doing all I can for you,' was the careless answer; 'you must get as much into that head of yours as you can in the time, that's all. And, luckily for your chances, they're not as strict as they might be at Margaret Hall. They let in some pretty thick men in my time. Don't you worry yourself, and, look here, I'm going out for a stroll. You read over this chapter on the uses of *οὐ* and *μή* while I'm gone, and see what you make of it. I shan't

be away more than an hour or so.' So saying, he leaped lightly out of the window, and disappeared for the rest of the afternoon.

Much of his teaching was conducted on this principle, but his presence was of very little actual assistance to Allen, who much preferred him away. Mutual concessions were arrived at between them during the hours they had to pass shut up alone together. Allen found his tasks reduced to copying and re-copying certain indispensable mnemonic outlines of Melladew's own invention—tips, figures of propositions, arithmetical recipes, and so on, while the tutor smoked and polished triolets. He was loth to leave his present quarters, and consoled his conscience (for he had one, in a rather debilitated condition) by the reflection that, if he was not doing his pupil much good, he was keeping him out of mischief at all events. It was quite possible that he might be received without reference to his attainments at easy-going Margaret Hall; in any case, Fanshawe was right, there was no sense in quarrelling with one's bread and butter, a form of disagreement which, even in the most contentious breasts, is harder to provoke and easier to reconcile than most misunderstandings.

It seemed that the Hothams' hurried departure on the night of the concert was not, after all, caused by anything on the platform. Joceline fluttered up to Margot after church on the following Sunday and explained. 'Hope you didn't think me a wretch the other evening; but we had to run away, the atmosphere was too dreadful; poor mamma has not been out since. I hear your brother sang or did something after we left. I didn't know he was clever in that way.'

'Nor we,' said Margot, wondering whether this ignorance could be real. 'It's so nice to meet people who can do things,' said Joceline; 'you sing so exquisitely. Mamma has raved about it ever since. She is coming over to call some day this week.'

And, what was more, Lady Adela not only did call but actually sent over a groom some days afterwards with an invitation to dine at Hawleigh. Allen was included, but Mrs. Chadwick made excuses for him on the ground that he was studying hard for Cambridge. 'I simply could not enter a room with that dreadful boy behind me,' she told her daughter.

'No, dear,' said Margot, 'if we must have our family skeleton, at least we won't drag it out to dinner with us. Thank goodness, he will be at Cambridge very soon now, and perhaps he will be more presentable.'

At the end of July, Reggie came home from school, greatly to the delight of Lettice, who was sadly in want of a playmate. 'I get on awfully well with the fellows, Lettie,' he informed her complacently; 'they know directly whether a chap's a cad or not. What do you think I heard Bigg Major say about me?—he's head of our house, and no end of a swell—he really said it, I heard it myself.'

'What *did* he say, Reggie?'

'Well, it was like this—he was with another sixth fellow, and I was passing, and he said, quite out loud, "Do you know who that fellow is?" And the other fellow said "No"; and then he said, "It's young Chevening, *he's not half a bad little squirt,*"' and Reggie looked as if he expected her to be overwhelmed by this magnificent tribute.

'But why aren't you half a bad little squirt? I don't understand, Reggie.'

'Oh, it's no use telling girls anything!' said Reggie disgustedly. 'I thought you'd like to know. Who's that long-haired chap staying here?'

'Mr. Melladew—he's Allen's tutor. Did you know Allen was going to Cambridge?'

'What's the good of sending *him* to Cambridge. He'll be a regular smug there—that's the word for a cad at Cambridge, you know. I suppose you think he isn't a cad, but then you don't know anything about it, you see.'

'I don't like him as much as I did,' Lettice confessed. 'He was not at all kind to me, and I haven't made friends with him yet; I don't think I shall.'

October came, and Melladew took Allen up to Cambridge for his matriculation, having been charged to see him through it and provide him with all a newly-fledged undergraduate requires. Ida drew a sigh of profound relief. It was not her last parting with Melladew—he was to return when Allen was comfortably settled, Chadwick having prudently left the question of fees until he knew the result.

'Hennie,' said Ida, 'he will be back to-day. Oh, do you think he will go away again without ever telling me that he likes me a little? I care for him so awfully!'

Miss Henderson felt a certain uneasiness at the sight of the pale face and wistful eyes. She wished she could have broken the truth, but, to prevent Ida from conceiving a dangerous jealousy, it had been necessary to encourage her in her delusion. She herself was still in doubt whether her own schemes would succeed—it was too ridiculous that this little chit of a girl should pose as a rival.

'You are very young, darling girl,' she said. 'You must be patient and wait, that is all I can say at present.'

'He has come!' cried Ida springing up. 'I hear wheels on the drive—yes, there is the old fly from the station, and he is getting out, and—and, oh, Hennie! what can have happened? Allen has just got out too! What does it mean?'

'It means,' was the answer, 'that Mr. Allen has failed in his examination. How *very* disagreeable for poor Mr. Melladew!'

CHAPTER IX.

DIFFERING CODES.

Now I thought she was kind
Only because she was cold.—*Maud.*

MELLADEW on his arrival had gone at once to the library, where he found Chadwick engaged in examining a report from his agent in Behar. 'So you've got back, hey? Well, and did you leave him comfortable—get him everything he wanted?' Chadwick inquired, which made it all the more awkward for Melladew to explain that the tutor of Margaret Hall had declined to receive Allen as a member, and that the luckless youth was under the paternal roof at that moment.

The ostensible reason for his rejection had been his failure to make anything of the matriculation papers, but the tutors of small colleges are not always inexorable in the matter of scholarship if the candidate seems at all likely to distinguish himself and the college in other fields. It is to be feared that Allen's fate was really decided in the course of a private interview.

'When I engaged you,' said Chadwick, 'I looked to you to keep anything of this sort from happening.'

'It is very unfortunate, of course,' said Melladew airily. 'I only know I did my best for him.'

'Do you mean to say he wouldn't work?'

Melladew shrugged his shoulders. 'I would rather put it down to natural incapacity,' he replied.

'Oh, you would? Just send him in here, will you—and come back yourself.'

When Allen had appeared in all the consciousness of failure, his father began stormily: 'So they've kicked you out, sir; you can't even pass a trumpery entrance examination that Fanshawe says any schoolboy could go through easily! It's your infernal unprincipled idleness; you know that it is! Mr. Melladew, here, tells me he did all he could for you, only you wouldn't work!'

Allen had had a great deal to bear for the last two days; he was smarting under the sense of deception and injustice, which found utterance at this.

'He says that?' he broke out thickly. 'He knows better! I told him again and again it was no use, and I couldn't make head or tail of the beastly things, and he said I needn't try, I should get through all right without troubling. He never took the slightest pains to help me; he never gave me a civil answer when I asked him to—he was always busy with his own writing!'

'That's the way you perform your duties, is it, Mr. Melladew? What have you to say to that?'

‘Only that I undertook what I did not know till later was impossible.’

‘And, sooner than give up and lose your money, you went on, and let me believe everything was going on well, and left him to take his chance? Thought you’d pocket your money all the same, did you? Well, you’ll find your mistake out, that’s all! You won’t get a farthing out of me, Mr. Melladew, without suing for it; and I shall give my reasons for refusing to pay, too, so you’d better think twice before you go into court. And you’ll please to leave this house at once, there’s an afternoon train you can just catch.’

‘I will leave the house certainly,’ said Melladew, with as much dignity as he could command, ‘and as to the words you are pleased to use, I suppose I must make what allowances I can for a very natural disappointment.’

He did not take the train, however, but sought shelter with his friend the curate, who consented to put him up for a day or two.

‘As for you, sir,’ said Chadwick to his son when they were alone, ‘I begin to see it’s no use my taking any pains or going to any expense for you. You’re a bad egg! I’ve tried to make a gentleman of you, but you’ll never be anything but what I found you. You’re a lazy, cowardly hound, that’s what you are, and I’ll leave you in future to go your own way. I just warn you of this—that if I have any more trouble with you, I’ll pack you off to India, where you’ll be looked after and made to earn your own living. Now you can go!’

Allen was not long in obeying this fatherly admonition; he was profoundly miserable at his failure for the first day or two, but by-and-by he began to find a consolatory side to his situation. His brief experience of Cambridge had rather awed him; the glimpses of manners and pursuits seemed so totally strange to him, the boys with an ease and manliness in their bearing that made him feel enviously inferior, the awakening stir of undergraduate life, with all its contrasts of placid study and active exercise, bewildered rather than attracted him; he was depressed by the gloom and silence of the stately old colleges, and saw no place for him in either the work or play of the great University.

Save for the first sharp sting, when the college tutor with a grave kindness had made him understand that it was not possible for Margaret Hall to admit him, he felt little regret at his exclusion. Now, at least, he would not be separated from Margot; he even comforted himself with the idea that she would pity his mishap.

Chadwick soon made his household aware of his latest disappointment; his wife indulged in a few sub-acid comments; Margot kept silence, though inwardly raging at the defeat of her plan at the moment when it bid fair to succeed. Now she must resign herself as best she could to the constant irritation Allen was to her nerves—she had taken little indeed by disregarding Nugent Orme’s advice. Ida shed bitter tears when she was alone with the governess. ‘He

has gone away without a word to me! Oh, Hennie, he—he must mean to write, tell me you think he will!’ she repeated again and again, and Miss Henderson had to calm her by giving the required assurance.

The morning after his return, Allen, with no impossible tasks to occupy him now, was wandering listlessly about the house, and presently came upon Margot and Ida, who were filling some vases with autumn foliage, great amber fans of chestnut, and sprays of ruddy beech and crimson bramble, which they were arranging on a table in the hall.

‘Let me help,’ he said, glad of the opportunity to be near Margot, ‘I’ve nothing particular to do.’

‘You have done quite enough, I think,’ said Ida, her pale cheeks reddening with anger; ‘and we don’t want your help, do we, Margot?’

‘It’s bad enough to have the governor always jawing at me,’ he remonstrated, ‘without *your* joining in! Margot won’t be rough on me, I’m sure; it isn’t as if I could help not getting into Cambridge.’

‘You could help putting all the blame on other people, at least,’ said Ida quickly.

‘I’m not talking to you,’ he retorted; ‘we all know whose part you’d take!’

‘Margot thinks just the same as I do—that you acted like a sneak; a horrid, ungentlemanly sneak—don’t you, Margot?’

Miss Chevening raised her eyes for a moment, and replied, ‘Most decidedly I do.’

A sneak! This was an aspect of himself which had never occurred to him. Why was he a sneak? he wanted to know; what had they to say against him?

‘You got poor Mr. Melladew turned out of the house, actually turned out in disgrace, because you made your father believe that he took no trouble with you—as if you deserved to have any trouble taken with you,’ said Ida, the branch she held quivering in her passionate grasp.

‘It was true,’ said Allen, ‘he never troubled about me; he was out half the time he ought to have been with me, and, when he was there, he did nothing. Why was I to take all the blame, and he get off, tell me that, Margot?’

‘There was no reason why *you* should have done so,’ she replied, with a calm disdain; ‘only gentlemen do not act quite in that way, that is all.’

And she turned away, as if he was really unworthy of serious notice, and began to select her berries and wild-rose haws with leisurely, fair hands.

This was more than he could bear just then, especially after his hopes of receiving her sympathy. ‘Look here, Margot,’ he said, ‘I don’t care what Ida chooses to say or think, but I can’t stand *your* being against me—it knocks me over altogether. I—I’ve

always tried to get your good opinion, you know I'd do anything to please you—I mean it—*anything*. I'll act like a gentleman, if you'll only teach me how." I've not been brought up in such ideas.'

In his earnestness he had forgotten that Ida was still in the hall, but she recalled him to the fact by a contemptuous laugh. 'I'm afraid you will want a good many lessons!' she said, as she carried off one of the finished vases. 'Margot, my dear, I wish you joy of your pupil.'

Allen sat down at the centre table, on which he leant his elbows. 'Margot,' he pleaded, 'you might look at a chap. If I've acted so bad, tell me what a real gentleman would have done—someone like Orme, we'll say.'

She did not turn her eyes on him as he sat there, but her manner was distinctly gentler as she answered: 'Mr. Orme—any gentleman—would have borne anything rather than try to shield himself at another's expense. Just think how mean it is—it's exactly what sneaky little boys say at school. "If you please, sir, So-and-so was as bad as I was!" Do you really tell me that you don't see anything disgraceful in a defence like that. If you don't, you must be quite hopeless!'

'I do. I do now. I—I was so riled at being told I was idle, I said it without thinking. And listen, Margot, I promise faithfully next time I'll act better; you shall never have to say this of me any more.'

'Ah,' she said lightly, 'we shall see when you get another opportunity.'

She said this with her ambiguous smile as she left the hall. He stood for a moment there, and then went out into the grounds, consumed by one burning desire—that the opportunity she spoke of might come speedily.

Melladew's unceremonious dismissal had naturally made him more interesting than ever in Ida's eyes. He was her persecuted hero, and she brooded sadly on his sorrows and her own. She had come to believe, with all the fervour of a precocious romantic mind, that he was nobly suppressing his attachment to her, that pride alone kept him from speaking. As the days went on and she heard nothing of him, the suspense told on her health and spirits, though she confided in none but Miss Henderson, who was always sympathetic and encouraging.

Ida broke down sometimes when alone, and it was after an outburst of this kind that Allen entered the schoolroom. 'Go away!' she said pettishly, 'this is our room, you have no business here.' She was turning her face from the light and drying her eyes furtively as she spoke.

'Why, you're crying, I declare!' said Allen, with all his customary tact.

'I'm not, then. So would *you* cry,' retorted Ida, 'if you had "Minna von Barnhelm" to translate.'

'That won't go down, Ida. I know who you're crying about—it's that tutor chap.'

'Allen!' cried the girl, startled past all dissembling, 'how did you know? It's not—not true. Why should I cry for Mr. Melladew? Why do you say such things to me?' To find her cherished secret surprised by the detested Allen caused her exquisite humiliation. He was much pleased by his own power of discernment.

'I've got my eyes open,' he said. 'I know who used to go with you on those walks.' She shrank back. 'You—you won't tell mother!' she cried.

'Ah, that's all you think I'm fit for!' he retorted bitterly. It would serve you right if I did, you're always going on at me. Look here, Ida, I'm not such a bad sort, and besides, it's all nonsense, this is. You know he don't think anything about you, and, if he did, he isn't worth your caring for!'

'You know nothing about it,' said Ida. 'You have no right to speak against him now you have driven him away!'

'How far away do you suppose he is at this present moment, eh?'

'How can I tell? Miles and miles—in London, I dare say.'

'Not he—he's never left Gorsecombe. He's been hanging about Paddock's Lane most afternoons. I've seen him there.'

Paddock's Lane was a narrow and unfrequented by-way which skirted the edge of the Agra House grounds. Ida's eyes sparkled. 'Oh, Allen, I'm sorry I spoke like that to you; tell me all about it. Did he speak to you—did he give you any message for—for anyone?'

'Now, what should you expect?' asked Allen, unable to forego the amusement of teasing Ida.

'I—I don't know—oh, yes, I know there was a letter for me—give it to me, quick!'

'Well, you're just wrong you see, Miss Ida, for there isn't. He didn't even mention your name. You know,' he said, 'I don't mean it ill-naturedly, I swear I don't, but you'd better give over any notions of that sort, you had really. Why, you're only a little girl; chaps his age don't think of school-girls in that way!'

He really meant well in his blundering fashion, but she naturally did not appreciate his good intentions. 'You say that because you hate me!' she sobbed, 'and it's not true, I know it isn't. He *does* care for me—you shall never make me disbelieve in him. I won't listen to another word you say. I'm stopping my ears!'

'Just as you like,' said Allen, as he moved to the door. 'None are so blind as those that won't listen!' He felt unusually epigrammatic as he left the room.

Presently Miss Henderson came back. There was a conscious look on her face that did not escape Ida's sharp scrutiny. 'Hennie, where have you been? Why do you leave me alone every afternoon like this?'

'Why, you exacting child, mustn't I leave you alone for a moment?'

'It was nearly an hour.'

'I just ran out for a minute to see if I could find those two tennis-balls. They had rolled under the Wellingtonia, Ida; now we've got all the twelve.'

'I don't care about tennis-balls, I want truth, Hennie. You have seen him—oh, why do you pretend you haven't?'

'Him? Oh, Mr. Melladew. Now, my dear Ida, what an idea!'

'If you are keeping anything from me, you will break my heart. Why are you so deceitful, Hennie? It's no use, that horrid Allen saw you,' she said, making a desperate venture.

Miss Henderson apparently decided that it was safest to admit the fact. 'You jealous little pussy,' she said affectionately; 'I've a good mind to punish you by not telling you a single word. I *did* see him—there! I shall leave you to fancy why he wanted to see me, and whom our conversation was all about.'

'Oh, Hennie, forgive me, I am so happy. That hateful boy said such things. And so he does think of me! May I see him to-morrow? I do want to comfort him so.'

'Not for the world, my dear child! Have you gone *quite* mad? He would not hear of such a thing, he is far too high-principled. And, to tell you the truth,' continued Miss Henderson guardedly, 'just now he feels a little sore about all this—he is so sensitive—he has got it into his head that you all despise him. If you knew the trouble I had to talk him out of it! No; you must leave this to me, darling; indeed, it would not do for you to meet just yet. Besides, he is leaving to-morrow; his father is dangerously ill.'

'May I write to him? Say I may, Hennie!'

'Not at present—we must run no risks—a little note by-and-by, perhaps, slipped in one of mine. Ah, Ida, if we were only away where there were no prying spies to make mischief! You are really looking very unwell. I shall tell your mother what a few weeks at Bournemouth would do for you—you have had no sea air this summer, poor child!'

'And we will get away together!' cried Ida eagerly; 'you and I by our two selves, and if you could let him know, he would come, I know he would, Hennie. You will manage it all, won't you? There will be no harm if you are there, and I can't live without seeing him.'

'Leave everything to me,' said the governess, 'and—well—we shall see.'

'I am so pleased, dear Margot,' said Mrs. Chadwick one afternoon, some days later, 'it isn't as if it was going to be a tag-rag-and-bobtail dance at Hawleigh; all the county will be there, and there are sure to be some smart people coming down for it. Only I do wish you had something better to go in. I would telegraph up

to Clémentine to do what she can for you, but there's so little time, and I really can't afford it.'

'I shall do very well, dear,' said Margot, calmly; 'my *tulle* is almost new.'

'You must look as nice as possible. I must see if I can find some simple ornament of mine you could wear with it, unless your own are better?'

'That is very unlikely, mother, because I haven't any—well, unless you count that great ugly locket and cable Mr. Chadwick gave me, and I can't wear that. And you know I haven't much money to lay out on trinkets, have I?'

'I wish I could make you a better allowance, you poor child; it is a shame you should have no pretty things of your own; but though I agree that you can't possibly wear the locket, it is quite a valuable one; I hope you take care of it?'

'Oh, it's all right,' said Margot lazily. 'It's in one of the drawers of my dressing-table, I believe.'

'You shouldn't be so careless; you ought to lock up everything of that kind.'

'It is quite safe where it is.'

'Fact is, Margot wouldn't care a hang if it *was* stolen!' said Allen's voice from the archway. They were sitting in the dusk, and he had entered the further room unperceived during this conversation.

Mrs. Chadwick started. 'Really, Allen!' she remarked, 'I had no idea you were there; it *is* so unpleasant to have people coming in in that silent way; one doesn't feel safe in saying anything.'

'Generally you say I make such a row when I come in. You were only talking about this grand ball the Hothams are going to give, weren't you? I'm going.'

'You!' exclaimed Margot.

'Yes. Father says he won't go; he had enough of Lady Adela when he dined there, and as I'm invited, he says I can be useful for once. I shan't be in your way, Margot.'

'Oh, dear no! Why shouldn't you go if you want to? You'll find it rather slow, though, if you don't dance, won't you?'

'Oh, I shall hop about somehow; perhaps you won't mind giving me a turn or two, Margot.'

'I object to being hopped about with. I think you must look out for a more vigorous partner, Allen.'

'If I don't dance with you, I shall dance with nobody.'

'How selfish! Shall you waltz about in solitude, or what?'

'Now you're chaffing. I don't mind your taking a rise out of me, you always do it good-temperedly.'

'I am good-temper personified; but it was merely curiosity to know how you would manage to pass your time if you don't mean to dance?'

'I shall get on all right; don't you fret about me,' was the phlegmatic answer.

Miss Henderson had not found it difficult to get Mrs. Chadwick to see that Ida needed a change, though it was less easy to gain Chadwick's approval.

'It isn't the money,' he said, 'but I don't notice that she looks any different from her sisters—it's all fancy, Selina, or else that Henderson girl wants a change herself.'

'Ah,' said Mrs. Chadwick, 'it is easy to see that Ida is not your daughter! I never hear of your refusing Allen anything.'

'There you go!' he said; 'I never said I wouldn't pay, did I? I've never set up any distinctions. And as to not refusing Allen, there you're all wrong, as it happens! I told him two days ago he'd have to be content with a smaller allowance in future, and he needn't expect me to pay his debts. If he likes to drive about with a set of riff-raff to race-meetings and pigeon-matches, he may for what I care, but he won't find me supplying him with money to throw away on betting, and so I've told him plainly.'

'Well, Joshua, Ida doesn't waste her money in that way, poor child, and she really ought to go.'

'Then let her go. Only a fortnight, mind; that's quite enough to set right anything that's the matter with her.'

It must be owned that Ida had been looking much brighter and more animated of late—a result to which certain messages extracted from Miss Henderson's correspondence had perhaps contributed. But the victory was won, and she and the governess were despatched to Bournemouth.

As the fortnight was near expiring the reports became a little disquieting. Ida was not gaining strength quite so fast, Miss Henderson feared; it would be cruel to remove her for at least another fortnight.

Chadwick fumed at this. 'I am sick of this dashed nonsense!' he said roughly. 'I don't believe there's anything wrong with the girl—all fancy! If it's necessary, that's another thing; but how am I to know that it isn't all eyewash?'

'Would you mind letting Margot go over for a day or two? You can trust her to decide whether Ida is really ill or not.'

'Well, that's not a bad plan. You can send her if you like. How soon can she go?'

'As soon as this dance at Hawleigh is over; she really ought not to miss that, Lady Adela has been so very kind.'

'Settle it among yourselves,' said Chadwick; 'I only want to know where I am.'

Margot was very ready to go for more reasons than one; she was anxious about Ida, and was growing more distrustful of the influence the governess had acquired over her. Margot was deeply devoted to Ida, and was more than a little jealous at finding herself no longer foremost in her sister's heart as she had once been.

The evening fixed for the dance at Hawleigh Court arrived, and Allen was waiting in the hall of Agra House until Margot and

her mother made their appearance. Margot was the first to come down, and as she came slowly down the stairs, fastening her long gloves, she looked fair enough to turn stronger heads than his. He stood there looking up at her, deprived of words for the moment. She was always beautiful to him, but he thought she seemed more hopelessly far above him than ever; and yet this was his step-sister; he saw her every day; he was going to a ball in her company—he felt thrown back into the old state of delightful but half-incredulous bewilderment.

‘Are you criticising?’ she asked carelessly.

‘I—I was thinking how jolly you looked,’ he said stupidly. ‘I wish you’d let me button your glove for you, or—or something.’

‘Thank you, I won’t trouble you; I prefer to do all that myself.’ She was taking in his appearance with even more than her usual disapproval. Poor Allen was not one of those fortunate persons who appear to advantage in evening dress, and the satisfaction which the last glance at her glass had given her was dashed now by the prospect of appearing in public with such an escort.

‘What a very remarkable bow!’ she observed; ‘it looks as if you had been *worrying* it.’

‘I can’t tie the beastly thing,’ he said; ‘will you do it for me, Margot?’

She shook her head. ‘I think it has earned the right to be let alone now, poor thing!’

Here Mrs. Chadwick joined them. ‘Tell Topham we are ready, please, Masterman. Allen, I hope you have a warm coat, because the carriage will not hold three inside with any comfort; there is plenty of room on the box.’

So on the box Allen had to go, a circumstance which he had not foreseen; he had looked forward to the drive in the carriage, with Margot sitting opposite, as the only inducement for going at all, but he did not venture to oppose his step-mother’s decree.

The night was cold and rather foggy, but Mrs. Chadwick lowered the window, complaining that she had had a headache all day, and that the air would do her good. She would not hear of going back, however, declaring that it was nothing, and would pass off as soon as they arrived. It would have needed a very serious indisposition indeed to force Mrs. Chadwick to have the horses’ heads turned homewards just then. So a little later they were slackening their pace and taking up their position in the file of vehicles, and the carriage-lamps were lighting up the ivy and rough stonework of the gateway, and casting a desultory glimmer on the trim shrubs and laurels as they drove up to the Court.

The fine old hall, with its broad staircase and gallery and black and white pavement, was crowded; the dresses of the women as they passed through making a play of delicate colour amongst the massed greenery and under the grim old suits of armour.

Margot found that she would not be condemned to a purely

contemplative form of enjoyment; several young squires and younger sons who had recently made the Chadwicks' acquaintance sought her out through the crush, and she very soon had more engagements than could be fulfilled in any one evening.

Some of her partners, smart young men in much request at big houses at that time of year, who thought dancing a decided bore after shooting all day, found a waltz with Miss Chevening so far from boring as to conceive a very strong desire to repeat the experience. For Margot, her partners were a mere succession of shirt-fronts, they all danced at about the same level of languid excellence, they were insipidly handsome and correctly unenterprising. She caught, herself wishing now and then for a glimpse of Nugent Orme's square keen face in the crowd, but he was abroad, she knew from Millicent, taking evidence on commission for some case he was engaged upon. However, she enjoyed her evening, she liked the very evident admiration she excited, she was not *blasée* enough to be indifferent to the sensation of circling to that admirable music on that excellent floor; it was pleasant, too, between the dances to wander along the panelled corridors or sit in the lantern-hung orangery, even if her companion for the time was not particularly interesting.

So it happened that many dances went by before she noticed that her mother was no longer in the place where she had left her. 'So sorry about your mother, dear Miss Chevening!' said Lady Adela; 'such a pity—oh, nothing to be alarmed about—a mere fainting-fit. You didn't know? I suppose she wouldn't let anyone tell you about it.'

'Where is she? let me go to her at once, Lady Adela, please,' pleaded Margot.

'Why, my dear, I expect she is at home by this time; dear Dr. Seaton thought she had better go as soon as she was able, and very kindly took her home in his own carriage. There is not the least need for you to desert us yet. Your brother will take care of you.'

'I think I should like to go at once if I may. If I had only been told, I might have gone with her; I shall be miserable till I know how she is.'

'I will send down to have your carriage brought up, then, if you are bent on going,' said Lady Adela, 'but I assure you she was almost herself again when she left.'

The next thing was to find Allen, and Margot begged her partner to help her in searching for him in the various rooms. 'Not in any of them!' said the young man; 'then, I tell you what, we'll draw the place where the ices and things are—wonder we didn't think of that.' There was the usual buffet set out in one of the morning rooms, deserted just now.

'No one there!' said her partner, 'no one, that is, who looks like——' He was always grateful he never finished that sentence, for Margot, with a slight flush, said: 'Thank you—that is my step-

brother, and now I really mustn't keep you from your dance any longer.'

Allen had retired to the buffet some time ago; he was tired of being wedged and elbowed and politely anathematised by the well-dressed crowd, on whose feet and trains he trod, so, feeling rather forlorn at the prospect of the hours that must pass before he could go home, and the long, cold drive outside, he was consoling himself with champagne, when, at a light touch on his arm, he turned and saw Margot. 'What, you'll give me a dance after all?' he cried; 'all right—I'm ready.'

When he heard what she wished, he obeyed with alacrity, her mantle and wraps were soon recovered and the carriage brought up, Sir Everard came forward to put her in, and Allen got in after her and took the opposite seat. 'No, I don't want to smoke,' he said, in answer to the suggestion which was all she could venture to make with Sir Everard and a crowd of footmen on the steps; 'I'm coming inside this journey.'

She felt powerless, in spite of her disinclination for his society, just then; the door was shut, Sir Everard stepped back, and the carriage rolled off.

CHAPTER X.

THE LAST STRAW.

She should never have looked at me if she meant I should not love her!

R. Browning.

O beautiful creature, what am I

That I dare to look her way?—*Maud.*

THEY drove on past the long line of waiting carriages, Allen with a glad surprise at his own good fortune. They two were alone together; the light from the lamps fell faintly on her face, framed in a dainty hood, as she leaned back, her half-closed eyes gleaming through their lashes, her lips slightly parted. The champagne he had taken had been just enough to conquer his usual diffidence, and make him more susceptible to her beauty than he had ever been before.

'This is jolly,' he began, 'being alone with you like this! I hardly ever see you alone now, Margot. You don't mind our being alone together like this, do you?'

'You might remember,' she said, 'that but for mother's illness we should not be alone like this.'

'It was only a faint—you aren't worrying about that, Margot? she'll be all right when we get home.'

'If only we were there!' she exclaimed; 'I shall be wretched till I know!'

She looked the more bewitching in her distress—he lost his

head altogether. Had not Bob Barchard said once that boldness was the only way to win a woman? How did he know that she might not have been fond of him all this time? He felt bold enough to-night to try his luck—when would he have a better chance?

'Margot,' he said, 'don't look so unhappy—let me comfort you!'—her eyes were wide open now—'I must tell you,' he went on rapidly, 'I can't bear you to be wretched, because—oh, Margot, I love you—I've always loved you—tell me you like me a little!'

She shrank back into the corner of the carriage. 'You!' she cried faintly—'oh, you don't know what you are saying—you can't—it's too absurd! Allen, have you gone mad? Let my hands go!'

He had caught her soft hands and held them tight: 'I am mad, if you like,' he said hoarsely, 'I do love you, and—whether you like it or not—you can't prevent me. I love you, I love you!'

Before she could free herself he had kissed her passionately on the lips, and then, suddenly recovering his senses, recoiled in terror at his own audacity. He had kissed 'fair Rohtraut' with a vengeance, but he could not find any reason to congratulate himself upon that just then.

It was some time before Margot could command her voice. If the gardener's boy had presumed to offer her such an indignity, she could scarcely have been more utterly surprised or felt more deeply humiliated. 'You coward!' she said at last, 'how dare you . . . how dare you! What have I done to deserve this?'

'I—I couldn't help myself,' he stammered 'I—I don't know what made me do it.'

'Pull that check-string at once,' she said imperiously.

Completely subjugated now, he pulled it without a word; the carriage stopped as she let down the window. 'Topham, Mr. Allen wishes to sit outside,' she said.

'Margot!' pleaded Allen, 'I won't——'

'You will be kind enough to get out at once,' she said, 'unless you wish me to walk home.'

He obeyed, and drove home on the box with Topham in a state of mind very far from enviable; and Margot, as soon as she was safely alone, relieved her feelings in a fit of passionate crying—this last shock, coming upon the excitement and her anxiety on her mother's account, had been too much for her overstrung nerves.

There was no trace of this weakness, however, in Miss Chevening's manner when they arrived, and she questioned Masterman eagerly as to her mother's condition, which absorbed all her thoughts for the moment. Fortunately, what he had to tell was reassuring: his mistress had instructed him to give Miss Margot her love, and she was much better and would see her in the morning. Then the butler locked up and retired, leaving Margot and Allen in the hall. She stood there in stately offence; he looked, as he felt, abject. At last, timidly, as though he feared whether he would be permitted to render her even this prosaic service, he lighted one of

the candles, and she took it without looking at him. At another time she would have felt the ridiculous element in the situation, but just then her resentment mastered all sense of humour; she went upstairs without deigning a word. He followed her humbly, 'Margot,' he said in an agitated whisper, 'tell me just this—what do you mean to do?'

'How do I know?' she returned over her shoulder.

'If my father gets to hear of—of this, he's as likely as not to pack me off to India!' he said gruffly; 'he swore he would if I didn't behave better. Margot, you—you won't get me sent away, will you?'

She was at the head of the staircase now, and faced him with white cheeks and burning, wrathful eyes. 'Don't speak to me,' she said. 'You had better not for your own sake!' And, without another word, she left him, and went down the corridor to her own room.

How was she to act? Little as he imagined it, Allen's hint about India had been the very worst plea he could have used. Ah, if he could only be got rid of in that way! But then her step-father would have to be told; he was capable of pooh-poohing the whole thing, of making it a subject for his powers of heavy raillery—no, the very thought made her hot with shame. If he took it seriously and executed his threat of banishing Allen, she knew that she had little to hope from his discretion, he was not likely to make any secret of the reason. But she felt very certain that he would not consider Allen's conduct a reason for sending him away. By complaining she would only publish and perpetuate an indignity she would willingly forget.

She found her mother very much her usual self when she went to her room next morning.

'So horribly stupid of me to faint like that!' she said. 'I've been rather overdone lately. I do hope you weren't frightened, darling; I wouldn't have you told; you see, Dr. Seaton kindly went home with me. It wasn't like leaving you quite alone, was it?'

If Mrs. Chadwick had not so plainly recovered, Margot would have forbore to distress or excite her; as it was, she could not refrain. 'If I had been alone, I should have been spared a great deal!' she said bitterly. 'Oh, mother, if I tell you, you must never speak of it to—to my step-father—promise!'

'You may trust me,' said Mrs. Chadwick, 'I am not in the habit of telling your step-father of your private affairs—tell me.'

'It was Allen—we were coming home in the carriage, and he—he made love to me! he did indeed, mother—he dared to kiss me!'

Mrs. Chadwick drew from Margot the whole story. 'I am as angry as you are, darling, every bit,' she said, when she had heard it all; 'that wretched boy! But I agree with you; we must keep it from your step-father—it would be too dreadful if this were to get about!'

'And must I go on living in the same house with him, as if nothing had happened?' cried Margot. 'Oh, mother, if only I could leave it—or he!'

'Well, you are leaving to-day for a short time, and you must have patience for a little while. His father grows more and more disgusted with him every day; it would take very little to decide him to send him away, but we must wait for a better opportunity than this; he might only laugh at us, Margot.'

'Yes,' said the girl, shivering. 'I know—I know. I only told you because—oh, how hateful it all is! If it would only end somehow—and soon!'

'Ah,' said her mother, 'that is too much to hope for.'

Margot was to leave for Bournemouth by a mid-day train, so that she had only just time, after a long consultation with her mother, to make her preparations for the journey. She was to travel without a maid, and Miss Henderson had arranged to meet her on her arrival.

The first person she saw upon the Gorsecombe platform was Allen, who had been hanging about there in a state of miserable uncertainty. She frowned in displeasure as he came up to her; it was their first meeting that day.

'It may relieve your mind,' she said contemptuously, 'to hear that your father will know nothing of what happened last night—some things are too disagreeable to be told.'

He could not help betraying his relief. 'God bless you, Margot!' he said; 'you shall never regret it—never! And—and I wish I had died before offending you like I did!'

'You were not asked to die—your only excuse is that you did not know what you were doing; now, never speak to me—to anyone—of this again. Let us both try to forget it.'

'Then you forgive me?' he said. 'Ah, I don't deserve it. I know I acted like a cad, like a rough brute as I am, but you'll give me a chance some day of showing I'm not ungrateful to those that treat me kindly—you'll do that, Margot?'

'I make no promises, and here is my train.'

She gave him a cold little nod as the train moved on; there was even a smile on her face, constrained, but still a smile; he saw the train recede down the line and watched till it was out of sight, then he turned away with a lighter heart. She had forgiven him—it was not hopeless yet—he was not to be banished from her presence, he might yet wipe out the recollection of last night; he was impatient for her return, when he might begin to win back her favour.

On her arrival at Bournemouth, Margot found Ida and Miss Henderson established in very comfortable rooms in a villa overlooking the Public Gardens. As far as looks were concerned, Ida seemed quite restored to her usual self, but there seemed a constraint and a want of cordiality in her manner to her elder sister which wounded Margot deeply, though she was too proud to show it.

'There is a very nice bedroom upstairs for you,' she said. 'Hennie, will you show Margot her room?'

'For the short time we shall be here, I could have shared your room, Ida.'

'No, you couldn't, Margot,' returned Ida quickly, 'unless you want to turn poor Hennie out.'

'Indeed,' said Miss Henderson, 'I will move to the other room at once if you would rather share Ida's, Margot.'

'You seem in a great hurry to get away from me, Hennie!' said Ida with a pout.

'Oh, pray don't let me disturb you,' said Miss Chevening, biting her lip. 'I will take the upstairs room—anything.'

It was not until the next day that she and Ida had anything approaching an explanation. They were walking together along the sands under the Boscombe cliffs; it was a bright November morning, with a mild sun and a keen wind, which blew the sea foam like drifting shreds of wool over the sparkling brown sand. Miss Henderson had declined to accompany them. 'You will have so much to say to one another,' she had said, and, somewhat to Margot's surprise, Ida had supported this warmly.

'Let us two go quite alone to-day, Margot,' she had said; 'Hennie won't mind for once!'

Yet, now that Margot and Ida were alone together, Ida's replies were brief, and charged with a resentful antagonism which the elder sister noticed at last.

'Considering that you were so anxious for us to be alone together,' she said, 'you don't seem to have much to say to me, Ida!'

Ida stopped and began to prod the soft masses of chocolate and puce clay at the foot of the cliff with her sunshade. 'What is there to say?' she asked in a muffled voice.

'Don't be a goose, Ida. If I have done anything to offend you, let us have it out now. I can see very well that you are not exactly pleased to have me here.'

'Because I know why you've come—to take me back with you. You think I am all right again; perhaps you don't believe there ever was anything the matter with me?'

'I don't think you are much of an invalid now, dear, at all events; and, indeed, I am afraid you must make up your mind to return soon.'

'How soon?'

'Well, the day after to-morrow at furthest.'

'Margot, I can't, I won't go so soon! You—you don't understand how it is! Oh, let me stay a week—only one week!'

'You have some reason for wanting to stay. Is it anything at home, Ida? come, can't you trust me?'

'Is it likely I should want to go back and meet that hateful Allen? Oh, Margot, he hates me! You won't believe it because he is always different with you—you can manage him, but if you knew how miserable he makes me—and it will be worse than ever now—it will drive me mad to go back without—unless—things are better!'

'They shall be!' declared Miss Chevening indignantly; 'you poor Ida, what you must have suffered! He is too utterly despicable for you to mind him, but at least I will put a stop to it in future. If I contrive for you to stay just one more week, will you be brave and come back then? I promise you that he shall not annoy you again, I will answer for that, and perhaps he will not trouble any of us very much longer. Only be a little patient!'

'A week!' cried Ida. 'It is all I want, Margot; you are a darling, and I am so sorry I was cross to you!'

'So was I, dear,' said Margot, 'because I can do more for you than all the Camillas in the world—if you would only believe it!'

'I do now; only don't speak against Hennie, because I can't bear it. Nobody knows what a friend she has been to me—nobody, Margot! And I have been so horribly miserable, dear!'

Margot placed her firm, protecting arm round her sister's slight form, her eyes were very bright and angry as she spoke. 'If I had known!' she said, 'but I will find a way to punish him yet, darling; leave it all to me!'

It never occurred to her that Ida had not stated the real reason for her objection to leave Bournemouth, or that she had exaggerated Allen's clumsy and not ill-natured banter into a vaguely malicious persecution. In her prejudice Miss Chevening was willing to believe everything that was bad against her detested step-brother. He deserved no quarter at her hands, and when her opportunity came, he should receive none.

So the two sisters came to a better understanding, and Margot returned from her walk possessed by a fierce indignation, in which some personal feeling entered, against her sister's tormentor. 'Is there no way?' she asked herself passionately, 'no way to get rid of him?'

Miss Chevening's meditations, wild and vague as they were, boded little good to the unconscious Allen, who was at that very time consoling himself by the thought that he was forgiven, and preparing by long and patient service to touch at last the heart of his disdainful lady.

Allen found the days long and blank during Margot's absence at Bournemouth. Without her the one excitement and object of his life was lacking. Of Lettice he saw but little now; the estrangement between them had never been quite healed, her childish faith in his goodwill had been too sorely shaken, and she obstinately declined to return to the old comradeship. And though her lessons were at a standstill, she spent most of her time with her mother.

His father had taken some shooting in the neighbourhood which kept him from being much at home during the day, rather to Allen's relief, for the return of the hunting season had revived Chadwick's rancour against his son. 'Hounds are to meet at Ramshott Heath at eleven to-day,' he said one morning at breakfast, after glancing at the notice he received as subscriber to the Hunt. Allen judged

it prudent to make no remark, which irritated his father. 'If you'd had the pluck of a rabbit,' he said bitterly, 'you might have been going with the best of 'em by this time, instead of loafing about doing nothing. It makes me downright sick to see a young fellow of your age with absolutely no idea of amusing himself!'

'It isn't easy to amuse yourself,' said Allen rather sullenly, 'when you're not allowed any money.'

'You were allowed money enough to begin with—and a pretty use you made of it! You'll have no more, I can tell you, till you show you're fit to be trusted. I've got too many expenses as it is, without giving you money to be flung into the gutter. But there—it's no use troubling about you. I did think once I should make something of you, but you've cured me of that long ago—go your own way!'

Such speeches as this left Allen with a stubborn sense of ill-usage. Was it his fault that he was ill-suited to a country life? As far as he could, he was trying to mend his ways and avoid bad courses for the future, but he had no means of employing his time except by wandering aimlessly about in all weathers, longing for Margot to come home—it was not dull when she was there.

'If it wasn't for somebody, Susan,' he said in one of the confidential talks which had now become frequent, 'I couldn't stand it. You know who I mean by somebody.'

Susan's vanity led her to misinterpret him—he had never spoken half so plainly before; he only needed a little encouragement.

'I dare say I could give a guess if I chose to try,' she said, with a fairly successful show of indifference.

'I thought you must have seen it. And, I say, do you think some day—not now, you know—I shall have any chance with her—*do* you, Susan?'

'A girl has her feelings—you can't expect to be met half-way. Nor it isn't likely anyone will have much to say to you while you let yourself be treated as a nobody in your father's house. Still, I may tell you this much—you'll never get anything if you don't ask for it.'

He was disappointingly dense. 'It's no use asking yet,' he said; 'I only wanted to know what you thought, and so long as you say there's some hope, I can wait.' And he turned and left her to extract what comfort she might from this hint of his intentions.

After all, Susan felt confident that she could induce him to commit himself to an unequivocal declaration whenever she chose. He was a poor creature, it was true; she did not care for him in the least, but it might be worth her while to gain a hold over him for all that. She was not even sure that she would refuse to marry him, as he was—his father would *have* to do something for them then.

Allen, little thinking of the hopes he had unwittingly encouraged, was walking aimlessly along the Closeborough road, when he heard wheels behind him, and presently Bob Barchard overtook him and stopped his cart.

'You'll excuse me for addressing you,' he began, with mock respect, 'you having rather given me the go-by, so to speak, since you took up with going to college, though I did hear tell as that wur all off, too. However, I'm not fit company for a young gentleman of your quality. I know that—you needn't get so red in the face over it neither. What I wanted to see you about was this: I've got something I was to give you when nobody was by. Came a matter of two days ago. I s'pose whoever sent it thought you and me was as thick as thieves still. I've been carrying it about with me ever since, on the chance of running up against you. It's a letter. There you are. Now my part's done—unless you'd like to step up and take the reins a bit.'

But Allen did not accept this invitation as he would once have done. 'No, thanks,' he said awkwardly, as he took the letter, 'I've no time for that to-day.'

'Ah,' said Bob, 'you've grown too genteel—that's what it is! Ain't you going to read your love-letter, and see who the young woman is that's gone and got sweet on you?'

'I'm in no hurry,' returned Allen, who was longing for him to drive on.

Barchard walked his mare for some time, until he realised that Allen did not intend to gratify his curiosity. 'Well,' he said at length, 'I see you've got grander in your notions lately. We go to the Vicarage now, 'stead o' the White Lion, and we turn up our nose at old friends. Can't say as I shall fret much over that—you ain't much loss in the way o' company, fur you never had pluck enough for a downright lark. I'm not one to force myself on nobody, I'm not, so I'll leave you to see what's inside o' that billy books. Come up, old mare.'

As soon as he had gone, Allen drew out the envelope and examined it, without immediately breaking the seal that fastened it. It was marked 'Private—to be delivered when alone,' in a bold and yet hurried hand that seemed familiar. His heart gave a leap as he tore open the paper and glanced at the signature—it came from Margot!

For a moment he almost feared to read this letter—the first he had ever had from her. It was wonderful enough that she should write at all—did she mean to retract her forgiveness? But no conjecture of his could have prepared him for what he read—he had to read and re-read before he could believe his eyes.

For this was the letter :—

'Madeira Villa, East Cliff, Bournemouth.

'MY DEAR ALLEN,—Do you remember saying once that you would do anything for me if I asked you? You can do something for me now if you only will, something that nobody else can. It is this. I want you, without letting anyone know, to go to my room, and get the locket and chain your father gave me. It is in one of the drawers of my wardrobe. Then sell it; you said once

it was worth 15*l.*, but get as much as you can and send the money to M. C., Post Office, Bournemouth. Whatever you do, don't let anyone see you, and send it soon, or it will be no use. You must do this and keep my secret faithfully from everyone. Even to me, I wish you to behave as if this had not happened, and not to speak of this until I give you leave. Remember, I am trusting you.

‘MARGOT.

‘P.S.—Destroy this.’

It is difficult to describe the effect this letter had upon Allen. Margot was in some trouble—and it was to him she came! The opportunity he had been longing for had arrived! What need she could possibly have for obtaining money with all this secrecy, he scarcely allowed himself to speculate. It was enough for him that she had chosen him to do her this service. She should find that she had not made an unwise choice. He was sure he could get the locket without attracting suspicion; it would not be difficult to take it over to Closeborough and dispose of it there. At least, he was not clever enough to foresee any possible difficulties here, though he would not have shrunk from them if he had.

The one redeeming point in his weak and narrow nature was the devotion he felt for Margot. In a moment of excitement, it is true, it had found a coarser expression, but in spite of that one outburst of blundering brutality, the fact remains that his passion was a purer and more disinterested sentiment in the main than might have been expected.

The letter calmly ignored any risk he might expose himself to by obeying such a request, and if he thought of the danger himself, it was only to be glad that some amount of courage and prudence was necessary. It made her selection of him the greater honour—would give him a stronger claim to her gratitude.

Her gratitude! the thought of the new and confidential relations that would exist between them henceforth swelled his heart with a delicious joy and pride. He had been looking forward with dread to the time that must pass before he could regain her full confidence, and now she had given him proof that it was restored already.

Was he a fool in feeling no hesitation, in entertaining no doubt or suspicion of the motive that might prompt such an appeal? Perhaps; but it was at least a folly of which he had no reason to be ashamed.

BOOK IV.

*As that ungentle gull the cuckoo's bird
Useth the sparrow.*—Hen. IV., Pt. 1, a. 3.

CUCKOO TACTICS.

CHAPTER I.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

Il y a des gens de qui l'on peut ne jamais croire du mal sans l'avoir vu ; mais il n'y en a point en qui il nous doive surprendre en le voyant.—*La Rochefoucauld*.

WHEN his first exultation had subsided, Allen set his thoughts to work out the best plan for obtaining the locket without exciting notice. He had no time to lose, and before he had reached home he had already decided that the best hour for his purpose would be as soon after luncheon as possible, when Mrs. Chadwick would be in the drawing-room and all the servants below at dinner. At luncheon both his step-mother and Lettice (his father was away shooting) remarked an unusual preoccupation and nervousness in his manner, which, being a poor dissembler, he had not skill to conceal. 'I don't expect Margot back for some days,' said Mrs. Chadwick in answer to a question. 'Why? Have you any reason for asking?'

'Reason?' he stammered as if her eyes were reading his secret; 'no, I—I only asked.' And he relapsed into silent confusion for a time, and then tried to open a conversation with Lettice, with a boisterousness which that young lady treated with a grave wonder.

He waited for some little time after they had left the room, until he might assume that the coast was clear, and then he stole softly upstairs and went down the corridor to Margot's room. At the door he paused in a sort of involuntary reverence, like some barbarian invader on the threshold of a deserted sanctuary; there was such an air of dainty freshness in this room which seemed impressed strongly with Margot's personality; he entered almost apologetically, and had to remind himself that he was only carrying out her wishes before he could muster courage to begin his search.

Fortune favoured him; nothing was locked except the wardrobe, and in that the key was left; he pulled out drawer after drawer, forgetting everything in his eagerness, until at last he found the triangular morocco case containing the locket and chain.

He slipped it into his inside pocket and came out, the first and most difficult part of his task safely and easily accomplished, as he thought, when he heard a little cry of surprise, and saw Lettice, dressed to go out, in her fur-edged cape and broad-brimmed felt hat, standing open-mouthed at the head of the stairs.

'Hullo, Lettice!' he said, with an awkward attempt to look as if he had been doing nothing unusual; 'going out?'

'Presently,' she replied. 'Allen—that was *Margot's* room!'

'Well, I know that—what of it?'

'Only—what can you want to go in there for?'

'I was passing, and I thought I'd just look in to—to see what it was like; that's all, Lettice.'

'If Margot was here she would be angry—she'd think it was *very* inquisitive of you.'

'What the eye don't see the heart don't grieve for! Margot wouldn't mind, and, anyway, it's not your business, Miss Lettice.'

'I know that,' said Lettice; 'but all the same, Allen,' she added, in the reproving tone she had taken with him of late, 'I don't think it is at all nice of you!'

'Oh, take a walk!' he said, relapsing into street slang in his excitement.

'I am just going to take a walk,' said Lettice, with dignity. 'Not because you tell me to, though!'

Much offended, Lettice marched into the drawing-room. 'Oh my darling!' cried her mother, really alarmed, 'have you been upstairs dressing by yourself? Did you hear anything? I'm afraid there's a strange man in the house—you ought to have waited for Roberts to come to you. I must ring for Masterman to go up at once!'

'A strange man, mummy?' said Lettice; 'why do you think there's a strange man here?'

'Why, because—oh, Lettice! I heard heavy footsteps just overhead in Margot's room—no one could have any business there at this time—no man, at all events!'

Lettice broke into a gay little laugh. 'You poor nervous mummy, *how* easily you are frightened! There's nothing to ring for Masterman about; he can't bear being disturbed at dinner; it's the only thing that ever makes him cross; he told Roberts so once. Shall I tell you who it was in Margot's room? It was only Allen. I saw him coming out.'

'Allen!' repeated Mrs. Chadwick. 'Did you speak to him, Lettice; what did he say?'

'Oh, he only just looked in for a moment to see what it was like. Wasn't it a funny thing to do, though?'

'It was a great liberty,' said Mrs. Chadwick. 'I dare say he

doesn't know any better. I'm glad it wasn't a thief, Lettie. I've such a horror of men entering the house.'

'So have I, dear, but only at night. It's so horrid of burglars to put on those hideous masks and frighten people in the dark. It wouldn't matter so much by daylight, so long as they didn't let off things.' (Lettie had a vague idea that burglars attired themselves after the fashion of a Fifth-of-November procession, which always caused her secret terrors.) 'Are you going upstairs?'

'Yes. If you see Allen, tell him not to go out until I have seen him.'

Now, Mrs. Chadwick had heard those steps—Allen not being particularly light-footed—for some minutes on the floor overhead; she also fancied she had made out the sound of opening and shutting drawers, and she was perfectly certain that Allen's declaration that he had only glanced in for a moment was untrue.

She went up to her daughter's room and made a careful search; the jewel-case was missing, and it was extremely improbable that Margot had taken with her an ornament she disdained. If she could only be certain that her suspicions were correct, if only her husband could be made to see the utter depravity and worthlessness of that young man—why, they might be rid of him at last!

'I must be quite certain before I do anything,' she thought; 'it would be very dangerous to risk making a mistake.'

Then she went downstairs, asked if Allen had gone out yet, and found him in the library studying the local time table. 'Are you going a journey?' she inquired pleasantly.

'Not far,' he said. 'I shall be back in time for dinner.'

'Where did you think of going?'

'Only to Closeborough.' He would rather not have told her, but he did not know what else to say. Margot had certainly made a singular choice of a confederate.

'To Closeborough!' Mrs. Chevening raised her eyebrows. 'Have you any business to do there?' ('He *has* the locket!' was her conclusion. 'If I could only be quite sure that bulging thing in his coat is not a cigar-case! But he has it, I'm sure, and he wants to go over to Closeborough to try to sell it. *Shall I let him?*')

But Mrs. Chadwick had a holy horror of scandal; she dreaded the publicity that might come if he drew, as he very probably would draw, any suspicion on himself by attempting to sell or pawn the trinket.

'What can call you over to Closeborough so suddenly?' she repeated.

'Nothing calls me over,' he answered; 'it's only something to do.'

'I will tell you something better to do,' she said; 'come for a drive with me. I am going to call on some people; you needn't come in if you don't wish it, but I can't have you getting into these

solitary habits. If you refuse me, I shall really fancy you have some business you are ashamed of!’

What could he do but abandon all idea of disposing of the locket that day? He could slip over to-morrow; perhaps Margot was not in such a very great hurry after all—his step-mother had not been so gracious for a long time—he consented to accompany her with such alacrity as he could show.

Mrs. Chadwick left Lettice, her usual companion in Margot’s absence, at home on this afternoon, and was most agreeable during the drive. She told Allen of her fears that a thief had been in the house. ‘I am sure I heard drawers being opened,’ she said. ‘There’s only one thing poor Margot has at all worth stealing; but I must make a thorough search some time this evening to see if it is missing; it was in one of the wardrobe drawers, I know!’

‘Perhaps,’ said Allen, looking away out of the window on his side and speaking with difficulty, ‘perhaps she took the locket with her to Bournemouth?’

‘How clever of you to know it was the locket! What made you think of it? But you are wrong; I am sure, quite sure now, that she never took the locket to Bournemouth. Very likely it will turn out to be in her wardrobe all the time!’

‘Oh, yes,’ he agreed, with a suspicious eagerness, ‘that’s where it is, depend on it!’ And Mrs. Chadwick smiled to herself—she saw that her hint had had its designed effect.

Allen’s heart sank at having to undo his work, but he saw no help for it. He must replace the locket now, or Margot’s difficulties, whatever they were, would be brought to light. How he cursed his own stupidity in having bungled like this—he had had his chance of earning her gratitude, and lost it after all! She would despise him, reproach him for failing her in her need. Perhaps, for want of this money, she might be in serious trouble, and he powerless! The only article of his own on which he could have raised money, his gold watch, had been stolen a few weeks ago at the Closeborough Autumn Meeting, or he would have sold that sooner than disappoint her trust.

His thoughts were very gloomy during that drive, in spite of his step-mother’s small-talk and evident desire to keep him amused. While she paid short visits at two or three houses in the neighbourhood, he remained in the brougham, chafing over his forced inactivity. If he had only been a little more cautious, he might have been over at Closeborough by that time; he might have sent off the proceeds of the locket and chain, whereas now he must take the first opportunity of replacing the case before Mrs. Chadwick made that search she had spoken of. Margot would never believe that he had even tried to help her; she would think he had been too cowardly or indifferent to make the attempt—it was very hard.

They did not return until darkness had set in. Chadwick was in his study, where his wife went at once. ‘I want your advice, Joshua,’ Allen heard her say as she entered, and then the door was closed.

She was consulting him about her fears, then. Allen had sense enough to be aware that he must lose no time in putting back that case where he found it. He slipped upstairs and went down the corridor, cautiously enough this time, until he reached Margot's door. To his horror, he found the door locked.

It was quite dark, he had not dared to bring a light, and it was impossible to know whether it was locked from the inside. He could feel that the key was not on his side of the lock. Could anyone be in the room? If so, who? He knocked softly, but there was no answer; he listened, but could hear nothing. He must get into that room and get rid of that case—but how? An idea came to him: the key might not be in the lock; any other key might fit it. He took one from the door of an adjoining room; it would not fit; he tried another; it went in and stuck fast—all his efforts could neither move or extract it, and he was afraid to use his full strength for fear of breaking it.

He grew hot and desperate, insensible to everything now but the necessity of getting that key out at once. When that was done, he would find Susan and see if she had removed the right key. If so, he could persuade her to give it to him on some pretext or other.

Was that Susan coming upstairs now with the rays of light preceding her? They shot down the corridor, and, too late to make any attempt at escape, he saw—not Susan, but his step-mother, still in her heavily-furred cloak, coming towards him. He was caught!

Mrs. Chadwick had locked the door herself and removed the key; she did not acknowledge to herself in so many words that she intended in doing so to lay a trap for her misguided step-son, to cut him off from all chance of repairing his error—it was an act of prudence, nothing more; a general precaution.

But she could not help a secret elation at finding her worst suspicions thus confirmed. He could not have played more foolishly into her hands than by allowing her to find him here.

She read guilt in his white face, which showed scared and mean and ignoble, as the light fell on it from the hand-lamp she carried. But, for all her certainty that he had the stolen jewel upon him at that moment, she avoided alarming him by any premature avowal of this conviction. 'Were you trying to open that door?' she said, as if she saw nothing unusual in such an attempt; 'it is locked, and—I think your father wants to see you in the study at once.'

Too relieved that she asked no inconvenient questions to think of disobeying this summons, he went down to the study, Mrs. Chadwick following with a suppressed excitement. 'Did you want me, gov'nor?' he began.

'I?' said Chadwick, 'no; what the devil should I want *you* for?'

'I sent him to you,' said his step-mother from behind, 'because I believe he can tell us something about this missing locket, if he will.'

'Hang it all!' said Chadwick irritably, 'haven't I heard enough about that for one evening? It's as likely as not she took it with her to Bournemouth. If she didn't, it serves her right for not being more careful. Why can't you wait till this evening? she'll be home then!'

'Margot? At home this evening! What are you talking about, Joshua?'

'Didn't I tell you? You didn't give me a chance—you were so full of this business. This came just as I was going out shooting. I put it in my pocket to give you—and you put it out of my head.'

He handed the pink telegraph-form to his wife, who read it aloud. 'Home at 6.45, send carriage.—Margot,' she repeated. 'What does it mean? she was to have stayed till the end of the week.'

'You had better ask her when she comes,' said Chadwick; 'she won't be long now, and it will be time enough to make a fuss about the locket when you hear what she has to say.'

Allen felt his heart grow lighter. Margot coming back—so soon! That got rid of his worst difficulties; he could give her back the locket, she could give what explanation she chose, and no one would be any the wiser.

But Mrs. Chadwick was determined not to lose her opportunity like this. 'Joshua, you must hear me,' she said. 'I am convinced that the locket was stolen—and that Allen knows who did it.'

'Then let him say, and have done with it,' said Chadwick. 'Here, you, sir, what do you know? No nonsense, now.'

Allen felt that he was in a position of extreme difficulty: the one idea in his mind at that moment was a fear of saying anything which might injure Margot; he knew he was not clever, and decided that his best plan was to say as little as possible.

'I don't know anything,' he said.

'Joshua, I must tell you what makes me take this—this very painful course. I have just found him trying to unlock Margot's door with a key of his own, for I had taken away the right one. I think he ought to explain what object he had for wishing to get into her room.'

'Good God! Selina,' cried Chadwick, 'are you trying to make the boy out a thief? Why, according to you, the locket was gone already—how could he be going to steal it? What do you come to me for with such damned nonsense?'

'If you will listen to me calmly, you will hear. You ought to know that I should not bring myself to make such a terrible charge as this without some grounds. When I told you that I heard sounds in Margot's room this afternoon, at a time when no one had any business there, I did not mention that Lettice saw Allen leaving the room shortly afterwards. I believe that he took the locket then. That when he found I had my suspicions, he grew afraid. That when I found him at the door just now, he was trying to get in and replace the locket before he was suspected. Yes, I believe—

I am as sure as I can be without actually seeing it—that he has that locket somewhere about him as he stands there! If I do him any wrong in saying such things he can very easily prove it. Let him empty his pockets.'

'Do you hear, sir?' said his father; 'if this is all a mistake—and, by God! I won't believe it unless I'm forced to—it's easy to prove it.'

'I didn't steal it—and that's the truth!' said Allen. 'If you aren't satisfied with that, I can't help it. I'm not going to turn out my pockets.'

'You'll not put me off like that,' said his father; 'you make me believe there's something at the bottom of this. It's no time for standing on any rubbishy dignity, I tell you—either show your step-mother that she's gone out of her way to suspect you, or, by heaven! I'll have you searched by main force. I will have this cleared up before we're very much older. Come, don't be an obstinate young fool—haven't I said I don't suspect you? But it's gone too far to stop here!'

Searched—and Margot's letter still undestroyed! She would come home to find her secret, whatever it was, disclosed; she would think he had betrayed her at the first alarm; she would despise him more than ever, as a coward and traitor as well as a fool! He dreaded the contempt he knew he would read in those proud hazel eyes, the curt but stinging comments she would make on the way in which he had fulfilled his trust. And then, suddenly, he saw a means of retrieving himself in her eyes—yes, he would show her that he—even he—could act like the truest gentleman, could bear to be accused of theft sooner than save himself at her expense! Had she not said herself that a gentleman would scorn to save himself thus? Would she not be grateful to him, even admire him perhaps a little, when she learnt what he had borne for her? And was not that worth bearing a little temporary disgrace for? For, of course, it would all be cleared up when she came back. So he drew the case from his pocket and laid it on the study table. 'You needn't search me,' he said, with an excitement that gave him an air of brazen defiance; 'if you must have it, there it is!'

The most unlikely persons have their imaginative fits, in which they conceive themselves as they never were or will be, playing to admiration parts for which nature has hopelessly disqualified them, in which the mind avenges itself on the body by calmly ignoring its existence. But Allen—perhaps because his imagination was limited—had never been able to picture himself as compelling Margot's admiration and remorseful gratitude by any deed of romantic heroism, so that—now the opportunity had come, and he had actually been worthy of it—he felt that he had been enabled to bear himself in this utterly unhopèd-for manner by some happy accident.

It may be said that it was a wrong-headed piece of heroism, after all—if there is any heroism at all in self-sacrifice with the

certainly of a speedy reprieve; and no doubt a cooler and clearer head than Allen's would have seen some way of preserving Margot's secret without incriminating himself.

But he saw none; and, at least, there was nothing insincere or calculating about his action, which was simply an attempt to follow a code of honour which Margot herself had been the first to reveal to him.

Whatever may be thought of the act itself, whether it be held Quixotism or self-interest in disguise, the fact remains that it represented a height far above Allen's ordinary standard of action—a height to which nothing but the force of his feelings towards Margot could have impelled him. No wonder if he glanced back with a disproportionate sense of triumph.

Low as his opinion of Allen had been of late, Chadwick had not really believed him capable of dishonesty until the case was actually produced. But with such ocular proof as that, all further doubt was impossible; the gradual undermining of his confidence and affection had made it easier now to accept the fact of his son's guilt. He drew in his breath with a sharp hissing sound, expressive of disgust and pain too, before he could trust himself to speak. 'Your low company and your fool's extravagance have brought you to this!' he said at last, with a low choked utterance. 'A thief! My God! that my only son should turn out such a hopeless black-guard as this!'

Allen stood there in dogged silence; he was not even hurt that his father should accept his guilt so readily; he was rather glad than otherwise—it simplified matters. As to hard words, he was willing to bear much more than that in Margot's service.

Mrs. Chadwick felt delivered from a great anxiety by Allen's surrender; her one dread throughout had been that, by some means unknown to her, he had already contrived to disembarass himself of the case. She felt almost grateful to him, so that she interposed between him and any further torrent of bitter reproaches with which his father might have overwhelmed him.

'Let him go now,' she said, 'you are not calm enough just yet to speak to him. Allen, you had better leave us.'

There was a silence after he had gone, during which Chadwick sat, frowning darkly, with his eyes fixed moodily on the ground, while Mrs. Chadwick stood, one hand resting upon the study mantel-board.

At last she began: 'I really can't tell you how grieved and shocked I am about this unhappy business, Joshua.'

He caught the insincere ring, which not all her tact could quite disguise.

'Can't you?' he said sardonically; 'in that case it's waste of time to try.'

She took no notice of this little brutality. 'I want to know what you think of doing,' she persisted coldly; 'it can't end here.'

'I suppose you want to have the boy charged at quarter

sessions—that would satisfy you, eh?’ he said, with an irritated twist in his chair.

‘You have no right to say such things. On the contrary, I am most anxious that this should be kept a secret. No one knows of it except our two selves, and no one must know—we cannot have any scandal.’

‘Do you think I am so proud of having a son a thief that I shall go about telling the whole county? But there’s one person who’ll have to be told, and that’s your fine Miss Margot—she’s the principal party concerned, and she ought to be consulted.’

‘Joshua, why distress her? You will not have her told?’

‘How do I know whether she isn’t mixed up in this, somehow?’ said Chadwick, purely to annoy his wife, and without any real suspicion of the kind.

‘Margot! Mixed up in this?’ cried her mother, turning pale. ‘How could she be? But if you insist on her knowing, I will tell her myself. Listen! surely that is the carriage, they are here already. . . . Not a word of this till after dinner, remember, Joshua!’

Allen, up in his bedroom, heard the wheels too: Margot was here, she would be told the disgrace he was in, and the cause of it—and then, ah! how different their next meeting would be from any that had gone before! Her eyes would be soft and kindly for him when she knew all he had gone through. He was sure that she would be as frank and outspoken in her praise as in her blame. So he beguiled the time by trying to picture to himself how she would look when he saw her next; what she would say and do. Poor fellow! luckily for him he was no prophet.

CHAPTER II.

AMATEUR HEROISM.

Le silence est le parti le plus sûr pour celui qui se défie de soi-même.

La Rochefoucauld.

MRS. CHADWICK only reached the hall in time to see the trunks being carried in under Masterman’s supervision, and Ida, half-supported by Margot, slowly mounting the staircase. She hurried after them and overtook them before they had reached the broad gallery at the top. ‘Didn’t they tell you I was downstairs?’ she cried, as she embraced them effusively. ‘I was so surprised to get your telegram, Margot! Ida, my pet, you are not looking as if Bournemouthe had agreed with you—and where is Miss Henderson?’

At the mention of this name Ida, who had passively submitted to her mother’s carresses, broke away suddenly, and presently they heard her door locked.

'Ida is not at all herself,' said Margot, answering her mother's mute question. 'She has had a great shock. Camilla has behaved very badly. It's too long a story to tell on the stairs, but we found a note this morning to say that she had run away to be married to Mr. Melladew. Poor Ida was so devoted to her that she felt it dreadfully—she had been kept quite in the dark, it seems. And altogether, mother, I was so uneasy about her that I thought it safer to come home at once.'

'You were quite right,' said Mrs. Chadwick, 'she is better at home. That double-faced girl! And to Mr. Melladew, too! They scarcely spoke while they were here, as far as I could see.' (Mrs. Chadwick had evidently not troubled herself to observe them very closely.) 'However, dear, I am not at all sorry she has dismissed herself—I have been making up my mind to tell her she must go, for a long while; nothing but Ida's health—— She will feel this for a little while, no doubt, but it is better so. And now, Margot, come into my room, I have something most important to tell you.'

'Not now!' pleaded Margot; 'let me go to Ida first. I am sure she ought not to be left alone.'

She went to Ida's door and knocked gently; it was some time before she could get any answer, but at last a hard dreary voice came from inside: 'Go away, please, I don't want anything—I'm tired.'

Margot eventually got her to unlock the door. Ida was still dressed, she seemed in a state of half stupor, a dumb misery beyond tears. Margot was afraid to leave her alone, and at length induced her to come to her own room, which had by this time been unlocked and put in readiness by Mrs. Chadwick's orders.

Then, still in her travelling dress, she came back to her mother's room. 'Ida is asleep now,' she said. 'I have given her my bed, and I can sleep on the sofa to-night. If she is not better in the morning we must send for Dr. Seaton. She seems quite broken-hearted at Camilla's conduct.'

'Ida will get over that, poor child. And I want to tell you what has happened only this afternoon. Margot, only fancy! that dreadful Allen very nearly succeeded in stealing the locket and chain your step-father gave you. Fortunately I was able to catch him almost in the act.'

'Stealing!' said Margot slowly, and then she pressed her palms against her eyes, after a habit of hers when she was trying to grasp a new idea. Presently she withdrew her hands, and her eyes contradicted the assumed indifference with which she asked, 'Have you told anyone yet?'

'I told his father in Allen's presence what I suspected—he made him turn out all his pockets. By a really quite providential chance, the case was in one of them.'

'Ah,' said Margot, with a little dry intonation, which made Mrs. Chadwick add rather hastily, 'I mean—he might so easily have thrown it *away*, you know!'

‘Did he say what he wanted it for?’ asked Margot.

‘He could not want it for any honest purpose,’ said her mother; ‘he has been getting into debt or something disgraceful, I have no doubt. But whatever his object was, there could not be a clearer case of theft—and to rob you, of all persons, and of your only valuable trinket!’

‘I don’t want to pose as a victim,’ said Margot. ‘I detested the thing. I would gladly have got rid of it. Mother,’ she added suddenly, with a shade on her white forehead as if she felt a certain shame in asking the question, ‘will—anything be done? Will this be passed over, like the rest?’

‘That, my dear, will depend to a great extent on you. Your step-father wishes to speak to you about it this evening after dinner.’

Margot shrank back with revolt expressed in all her pliant form. ‘To speak to me! Why—what have I to do with it? Oh, no, mother, I don’t want to hear about it. Let it be settled without me!’

‘My dear, don’t be foolish, and listen to me. I think—I only say, I think—that, with a little management, Allen may really be got rid of this time. What I am so afraid of is, that you may be tempted out of good-nature to make some excuses for him which might turn the scale. You *will* be firm? You know what an infliction he is to us all—we may never have such an opportunity as this again! You won’t say anything to lose it?’

Margot laughed a bitter little laugh at her own expense. ‘Am I so good-natured?’ she said. ‘You need not fear, mother. If he has any excuse, let him make it himself. I shall not. He must bear the consequences of his folly!’

There was a petulant energy in her manner, a settled determination to evade all responsibility, to wash her hands, if possible, of a matter in which she found it intolerable to be even slightly concerned, that reassured her mother.

Allen presented himself below at the usual hour for dinner. He thought to come down to find his character triumphantly cleared, to receive his father’s grudging amends, and read in Margot’s face that she appreciated his loyalty.

Nothing could have been further from his actual experiences. Margot did not appear at all, leaving it to her mother to make her excuses, and although his father did not address a word to him throughout the meal, there was that in his manner which showed that he considered Allen’s presence there as an additional outrage. Chadwick said little to his wife, drank rather more wine than usual, and glowered at his son from under his eyebrows. Mrs. Chadwick kept up as much of a conversation as was possible when the only events of interest had to be ignored before the servants. But after Allen had got over the disappointment of Margot’s absence, he did not mind much else; he did not find the dinner duller or more oppressive than usual, even; his thoughts were all dwelling on the

meeting that was soon to be, for his step-mother had mentioned that Margot would come down later. That she would speak, even at some cost to herself, it never occurred to him to doubt; he did not believe that there could be anything really wrong in her secret, and he had an implicit faith that she would not allow him to suffer this undeserved disgrace a moment longer than she could help.

'You will find Margot and me in the drawing-room, Joshua,' said Mrs. Chadwick at dessert, 'as soon as you have finished your wine.'

'I'll come now,' he said. 'I've no particular desire to sit over my wine in his company. As for you,' he added to Allen, 'you will stay here, or wherever else you like, till you are sent for.'

Allen sat at the table alone for some time; he knew that a conclave was being held in the drawing-room, but he had no uneasiness. Margot was there, hearing what he had undergone sooner than betray his trust, telling them how they had misunderstood him.

The council lasted a long time; the drawing-room was at the end of a corridor, and he could hear nothing. Becoming impatient, he rose and went to the fireplace, gazing out into the black depths through the big curved window, where the table, with its yellow-shaded lamps, white napery, and gleaming plate, was oddly reflected above the blades of hoary grass and section of frosty path in the foreground. He alternated restlessly between window and fireplace, unable to control his excitement. At last the summons came in a matter-of-fact form enough. Masterman appeared and said, 'I was to say, Mr. Allen, that coffee is served in the drawing-room.'

Allen started up eagerly—the moment of reward, of triumph, was at hand! His heart was beating violently as he went down the corridor and opened the door that led into the lesser drawing-room; there was a slight resistance as he grasped the handle, and he found himself face to face with Margot. She had apparently expected him to enter by the other door, and was about to escape, for she gave a slight start as she saw him.

'Margot!' he cried, and then the light faded out of his plain face—the words died on his lips.

She drew away from him; she did not offer to take his outstretched hand, only looked at him for one unwilling instant—and then averted her face. What was it he read in her clear eyes? Not admiration, not gratitude. Was it compassion struggling with an invincible repugnance, or—keenest stab of all—was it dread?

'You are wanted—there,' she said, with a little shiver as she indicated the further room, where his father and step-mother could be seen through the arch.

'Don't you go, Margot,' called Chadwick. 'I want you to hear this.'

She turned back reluctantly and took up her position behind her mother's chair, where she could be partly in shadow.

Allen could not take his eyes from her. She wore black that evening; one or two white Japanese chrysanthemums were trembling at her breast, her fair neck and arms gleamed through the lace of her dress, her eyebrows were drawn and her proud mouth set, as if she were nerving herself to go through a painful scene. She kept her eyes down and did not look at him again.

'Now,' said Chadwick sternly, 'for the last time, have you got anything to say for yourself? Not that there's any excuse for you, that I can see!'

She had not told! She had left him to bear the full brunt. For a moment his head whirled, he felt a mad revolt against such weakness, such cruelty, till he looked at her. How pale she was! How disdainfully defiant the pose of her head and the slight smile—more a contraction than a smile—on her red lips.

He saw it all; whatever her secret was, she had not found courage to tell it herself—she waited for him to speak, and evidently, though she was too proud to appeal to him even by a glance, she expected him to save himself—she had no confidence in his discretion!

In his first rush of indignation he might have spoken; but the thought that she *expected* him to do so, that she despised him in advance, galled him, put him on his mettle. He would force her to recognise that he was not such a cur as she chose to assume. The treachery should be hers, not his; she should see that she need fear nothing from him.

'I've no excuse to make,' he said huskily. 'I took the locket—there's no use in saying anything more now.'

She raised her eyes for the first time: the flowers on her breast rose and fell rapidly; he could only see her face indistinctly in the tinted gloom above the heavy lamp-shade, but it seemed to him that he caught a momentary look of wonder, of shamed and startled gratitude. If he had known the true history of the letter on which he had acted, and the motive which had impelled it, he would not have misread her face thus, and no chivalrous ideal, no half-digested notions of honour would have kept him silent. But he knew nothing—he saw only what his limited insight led him to expect that she must necessarily feel, and little suspected how far she was from either surprise or gratitude just then.

'Well,' said his father, in a halting and somewhat dispirited tone, and seeming to address himself to the fire-screen, for he did not look at Allen, 'I've warned you before that my patience wouldn't last for ever—though God knows I didn't expect anything as bad as this! Now you've gone too far. I've made up my mind what to do, and when I once do that, I don't change it again in a hurry, and—and the long and short of it is'—he seemed to find a difficulty in announcing his purpose—'that I can't keep you in this house any longer.'

Allen heard without understanding at first; he ought to have been prepared for this; it was true he had been warned, and yet it

had never entered into his thoughts till that moment that his sacrifice would have such a terrible consequence as this. It could not be—Margot would never permit it!—why did she not speak?

‘Father!’ he cried hoarsely, ‘you—you won’t do that . . . not turn me out? Where am I to go?’

‘I have settled all that,’ said Chadwick. ‘I’m not going to treat you as my father did me, though you deserve it much more than I did. I shall send you where you’ll have every chance of turning over a new leaf, if you like to make use of it. You will go out to Bengal.’

‘To Bengal? India!’ stammered Allen, ‘what can I do there?’

‘You’ll be kept out of mischief, at all events. You’ll have opportunities of working at the factory; and indigo-planting is better for you than hanging about here and going to the devil as fast as you can.’

The wretched boy turned to Margot in his despair. ‘Margot,’ he cried, in passionate appeal, ‘you hear? You won’t let them send me away? Oh, tell them . . . speak for me . . . you *know* I—I don’t deserve this!’

‘Allen,’ said Margot, in a low agitated voice, ‘it—it is not fair to appeal to me. I can say nothing for you that you cannot say for yourself. Mother, let me go,’ she pleaded, bending over Mrs. Chadwick’s chair; ‘I cannot bear this—I cannot be wanted here now!’

‘She may go, Joshua?’ said her mother interrogatively; ‘she has had a trying day—it is cruel to keep her here any longer.’

‘Let her go if she wants to,’ was the reply. ‘Stay, she’d better take this with her.’ He took the morocco case out of his pocket and held it towards her. Margot took it with reluctant fingers. As she passed Allen on her way to the door, she gave him one look; there was compassion in her eyes, but anxiety in her quivering lips—something shrinking, deprecating, even, in her whole bearing. She seemed half-inclined to speak, to give him her hand at parting, and then, with her proud neck bent, she turned away and left him without a sign.

She was proud to the last, then? She knew that it was in his power to denounce her, and yet she would not stoop to supplicate even now—she had gone away because she would not stay to hear herself accused. The thought that she still expected him to betray her stung him the more because, in his first revolt against Fate, it had crossed his mind that he might surely be justified in speaking now. But that look of Margot’s had for the second time produced a revulsion. She had no confidence in him, she believed that he would give way under this last strain, and proclaim his innocence and her disgrace. Well, he would not; he had begun, and he would go through with it to the end. Perhaps, even yet, when she knew that she had been mistaken in him, she would relent before his sentence was carried out. But, whether she did or not, even separation from her was better than living under the burden of her contempt. As things were, she was deeply indebted to him; proud as she was, she

could not help knowing that in her secret heart. For once he could feel that the balance of superiority between them had changed sides.

And then a dogged resentment against his father came in to sustain and strengthen his resolution. He chose to believe him guilty, to drive him from home like a criminal. Very well, then—Allen was not going to undeceive him; home had been no home to him, except for Margot's presence, for a long time—it would not break his heart to leave it.

All these considerations were present in a confused fashion to his mind in the few seconds that elapsed between Margot's departure and her mother's next words.

'Allen,' said Mrs. Chadwick, 'you see how your conduct distresses your step-sister. I must beg, I must really insist, that you make no more appeals of that kind to her; she has much to bear just now, and if this is to continue, I must forbid you to speak to her at all—it is so unmanly!'

'Come, Selina,' said Chadwick gruffly, 'the boy's going—let that be enough for you, without nagging at him!'

'You have the art of choosing the most offensive expressions, Joshua,' retorted his wife, colouring angrily. 'I do not belong to the class of persons who nag, I hope! And I wish Allen to understand this—though perhaps you will find a term for that, too—for his own sake and for ours, he must keep an absolute silence about the reasons that have led to his going away. We shall, of course, do the same. I cannot have my daughter's name mixed up with a vulgar story of theft. No one at present knows of this. All it is necessary to say is, that he is going out to learn to be a planter, and that this has been decided upon for some time—there is every reason why more should not be said. Allen, you understand that?'

'Your step-mother is right,' said his father; 'it's lucky we can hush this up. So you'll hear no more about it from us, and, of course, you'll hold your own tongue—that's all you can do now.'

'Yes,' said Allen, 'I'll hold my tongue. And—when am I to go, father?'

'As soon as I can manage it,' said Chadwick. 'In about a fortnight, I expect. I shall write to my agent to-night, and tell him to come down to Bombay and meet you. I can take you up to town next week, and get you all the outfit that's necessary. Macdonald can see after the rest. That's all I've got to say to you to-night. You'd better be off to bed, and think yourself lucky you've been spared from bringing open disgrace on your head!'

Allen stood there for a moment, wondering whether his father would offer his hand, or say good-night at parting; he did neither, and so the son went out, and carried an aching heart and a confused head to bed with him.

So far from being benefited by her stay at Bournemouth, Ida

had come back worse by many degrees than when she started. For days she lay in a listless semi-lethargic state, repulsing all attentions with an unnatural hardness, praying only to be left alone with her misery. Dr. Seaton, who was called in, asked whether she had received any sudden shock, if she had anything on her mind; and being informed that a governess to whom she was much attached had left her suddenly, asked no further questions, like the discreet family practitioner he was, but remarked blandly that no doubt that would account for the symptoms; prescribed perfect quiet and rest for the present, and a complete change of scene and surroundings as soon as she was able to bear it. Privately he had his doubts whether the departure of Miss Henderson would account entirely for his patient's utter prostration—doubts which, as the reader knows, were not without foundation.

By what an elaborate tissue of deceit Miss Henderson had encouraged the poor girl in her absurd delusion, Ida and she could alone have told. It was not, of course, mere gratuitous cruelty on her part. Miss Henderson had set her mind on marrying Melladew, who, owing to the death of his father, was now his own master. He was willing to marry at that moment, provided he was not obliged to make any extraordinary efforts; but she knew that if she lost her opportunity now it might never recur. She had induced him to propose a marriage at Bournemouth, but, Melladew's movements being necessarily uncertain just then, she had, of course, to reside herself in the Registrar's district for the full period required by law. Her utmost ingenuity was taxed to induce Ida to be patient, and to account for Melladew's failure to appear, as she had been led to expect he would do. He jeopardised her scheme by paying a flying visit to Bournemouth in the second week of their stay, for he met her with Ida accidentally and behaved with such marked coolness that Ida declined for some time to be comforted. Then the governess offered to see the young man herself, and ascertain his true feelings, and came back with an explanation which Ida found satisfactory and even encouraging. Margot's arrival was welcomed by neither party, and certainly rendered Miss Henderson's part additionally complicated. But her talent for intrigue, and the ascendancy she had over Ida, carried her through. Ida was still anxiously counting upon the result of an interview the governess was to arrange for her, when the blow fell. A few hasty lines from her beloved Camilla announced that she had been married that morning before the Registrar to Melladew, for whom it should be said here that he had no suspicion of the deception that had been practised upon Ida.

The disillusion, when it came, was cruel and crushing. School-girl as she was, the passion that had filled her inexperienced heart was deep and real enough, and it had been artfully fostered and heightened. It was all morbid, and unhealthy and forced, no doubt, but that only made it the more humiliating, more impossible to confide to any other ear. She writhed helplessly at the thought of

how she had been duped, how they were both perhaps laughing at her infatuation.

Her belief in human nature, her interest in life, were shattered; she lay in blank misery, with only one desire left—to defend the secret of her sick heart to the last.

She might perhaps have made a confidante of Margot, who was the only person whose presence she at all tolerated, but there were reasons which prevented her. Margot and she had been less intimate of late, and she knew, too, that her sister had never had a high opinion of Melladew. Bitterly as he had deceived her, Ida could not endure to hear him slightly spoken of, and so she brooded and suffered in silence.

Her delicate system soon showed signs of being physically affected; for days she was really ill, and, from weakness and exhaustion, more or less unconscious. Margot was her constant attendant during the period, hardly leaving the sick-room. In any case her deep attachment to her sister would have made her undertake these duties cheerfully; now, she welcomed them for an additional reason. They made it easier for her to avoid Allen.

She had to meet him occasionally, though she had contrived hitherto that others should be present; but his face haunted her with its sombre dejection even in the sick room. She felt pursued by a reproachful appeal which irritated, exasperated her, even. She was afraid of herself, afraid of undoing her own deliverance in some moment of sentimental weakness. It was so clearly good for them all—for him especially—that he should go. Why should he take his banishment to heart so absurdly? Why should he not understand that she *could* not plead for him?

And Miss Chevening did her best to stifle her conscience and harden her heart, succeeding so far as to look forward with a growing impatience to the day when Allen would depart.

‘I think you are better to-day, darling,’ she said one day to Ida; ‘you will be able to come downstairs very soon, and you need not be afraid of being annoyed by Allen—he is going away.’

‘Is he?’ said Ida, languidly. ‘Why should I be afraid of being annoyed, Margot?’

‘Why, dear,’ said Margot, with a secret disappointment that Ida showed so little satisfaction, ‘you know you told me that he made you miserable!’

‘Did I?’ she said wearily. ‘It all seems so long ago. I forget. Why is he going?’

‘Because,’ said Margot, who could not trust Ida with the true story, ‘his father thought it was better for him to be learning indigo-planting out in India than doing nothing here.’

Ida was silent for a few moments, taking in this with the slow intelligence of a convalescent. At length she said, ‘He is not being sent away, I suppose, Margot—not to punish him for anything?’

‘Of course not!’ said Miss Chevening hastily. She was glad

that she was in a position where her face was not to be easily scrutinised.

'I am glad of that,' said Ida softly—and in Margot's ears the words sounded like a reproach.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNWILLING ARBITRESS.

Gaunt. 'Call it a travel that thou tak'st for pleasure.'

Bol. 'My heart will sigh when I miscall it so,
Which finds it an enforced pilgrimage.'—*Rich. II.*

'And I know
That all these pains are trials of my faith,
And that thyself, when thou hast seen me strain'd
And sifted to the utmost, wilt at length
Yield me thy love and know me for thy knight.'

Pelleas and Ettarre.

WHEN Gorscombe learnt, as Mrs. Chadwick lost no time in enabling it to do, that Allen was to go out to India almost immediately, it did not excite itself greatly over the intelligence. He was the least seen and (not an invariable consequence) the least interesting person in the Chadwick *ménage*—a common-looking young man vaguely understood to be disreputable in a commonplace fashion.

Still Gorscombe did discuss the matter, as it discussed every piece of local news, from a suicide to an outbreak of swine-fever. The cleverest Miss Eddlestone said a thing about it which went the round of village drawing-rooms, and was thought a little too satirical at the Dorcas meeting. Someone had observed to her that it seemed a little hard to send that young man out all alone to a distant plantation. 'Very hard!' she had agreed—'on the plantation.' But then Allen had sniggered once at the most effective part of her recitation of 'The Legend of the Monk Felix,' which naturally gave her a low opinion of his moral and intellectual nature.

Mrs. Chadwick went about planting her item of news in the best centres of distribution, with embellishments supplied by her own tact and ingenuity. 'My husband found it was absolutely necessary to send somebody he could trust out to those factories of his at once. So he thought it would be such a good thing for my stepson: it would steady him, teach him responsibility; for, of course, I need not tell *you*, my dear, he has given us a great deal of anxiety at times. And really, now he has got used to the idea, I think he quite looks forward to it—the novelty and activity, and all that; such a much healthier life for a boy of his tendencies!'

Had Allen got used to the idea? In a manner, perhaps, he had. There had been one terrible night of revolt, but that wore out into a

stunned acquiescence in his lot. And soon he began to find alleviations even in his misery. We have said already that he had a vein of sentimental self-consciousness in him which led him to take a morbid pleasure in being harshly treated, if only for the sake of the compassion he believed that he excited in Margot.

But he knew then that her compassion was mingled largely with contempt, and he knew, too, that he had more or less deserved it. Now the case was altered: the one person whose opinion he valued had the best of reasons for secretly being grateful to him, secretly admiring him even, however little she chose to show it. Conceive the fascination to a nature like this, full of vague romance for which he had no vocabulary, in the relations between Margot and himself during the days which followed his decree of banishment.

Living in the same house, meeting her from time to time, though only for a moment and in the presence of others, he studied her face on those occasions, and read there the pity he thirsted for restrained by a shrinking dread that he might yet fail her. No thought of despising her for her weakness came into his mind; it seemed quite natural that she should consent to be spared disgrace; he could not imagine her exposed and openly humiliated. His love, devotion, and reverence seemed rather to have been increased than lessened by her silent acceptance of the sacrifice. That she appreciated it he was sure; there was something subdued and softened in her manner to him that made her seem more beautiful and dear than ever. And yet, as the days went on, and still she gave no sign, he began, poor fellow, to wish for some avowal—ever so slight a one—of her indebtedness; she could not mean to let him go without a word! He knew that Ida's illness made great demands upon her time, but surely she could find an opportunity if she would. He longed to let her know that she was safe, that he would rather be banished from her than lose the privilege of her regard; he pictured himself pouring out all manner of highflown and chivalrous speeches to her as she listened sweetly remorseful. But she gave him no chance. She contrived always to avoid encountering him alone, and in time he found ground for a mad hope even in this. She did not mean to permit him to carry out this sacrifice; she was only trying his endurance—she would declare his innocence at the right moment! And meanwhile he had the excitement before him of that ever-possible interview, which almost kept him from noting how the time was slipping by.

He was in the library one afternoon, trying, by his father's desire, to master a treatise on indigo-cultivation, when the door opened cautiously. His heart stopped beating for a moment—he thought Margot had conquered her pride and had come to him. It was a crushing disappointment to see that his visitor was Susan. Susan closed the door softly behind her and stood there, her pretty, high-coloured face flushed, her hands in the pockets of her coquettish apron like a stage-soubrette. 'There's no one about,' she said, 'except Miss Lettice, and she's running about the garden. So I've

come in to have a talk with you. It isn't true that you're going right away to India, is it? Masterman was saying it was all settled.'

'It's true enough,' said Allen ruefully; 'in a very short time, too.'

'What do you let yourself be sent there for?'

'How can I help it? The governor's arranged it all.'

'I know better. Miss Margot's at the bottom of this, I'll go bail!'

Allen started. 'What do you know—she hasn't told you?'

'There's some things as need no telling,' said Susan enigmatically; 'but do you mean to put up with it—to let that proud, stuck-up minx get you turned out of house and home? You can't be such a fool!'

'I'd sooner bear anything than say what might get her into trouble.'

'Get her into trouble!' repeated Susan, her eyes sparkling. 'Well, to be sure,' she added diplomatically, 'there's that to be thought of. She's afraid you'll tell on something she's been up to, and that's why she's so anxious to get rid of you. But you won't go, not if I can prevent it.'

Allen began to be afraid he had said too much. 'Look here, Susan,' he said, 'if I choose to say nothing it's my affair. If—if she wishes me to go I shall go, and there's an end of it; you've no business to interfere that I can see.'

'And that's the way I'm treated!' cried the girl, coming nearer, 'after all you've said to me!'

Allen stared at her in blank dismay. 'I! What have I said?'

'What have you said! Haven't you told me times out of number that if it wasn't for me you wouldn't live here any longer? Haven't you asked me if I thought there was any hope for you some day? Haven't I as good as told you that if you liked to speak plain I was ready to marry you?'

He fell back in a bewilderment that was almost ludicrous. 'I don't know what you mean,' he said.

Susan advanced to the table, and, resting her hands upon it, bent forward to him. 'Then I'll speak plainer,' she said breathlessly, 'the time's gone by for picking words. You ain't fit to take care of yourself: you want someone that will look after you and see you're not put upon. I'm a match for Miss Margot, I am, if I'm given the chance. Marry me on the quiet—it's easy to get a special licence or something if you know how to manage it. I've put by enough if you can't get the money. You might do worse than marry me, if I *am* only a servant. And I'll see they don't ship you off out of the way then.'

'You don't understand,' said Allen; 'you've always been kind and that, Susan, but I never had a notion of thinking of you in that way. And as to what you say about my telling you I wouldn't stop here but for one person, and all the rest of it—why, I remember saying that now, but it wasn't you I meant, it was her.'

'Her!' demanded Susan, her face visibly falling, 'what her?'

‘Why, Margot; there never was anyone else for me since I first saw her.’

Susan had played a desperate stroke; she did not, as has been said, care in the least for Allen, whom she thoroughly despised; but she had believed that he was quite capable of being induced to marry her if she thought fit to give him encouragement. She felt certain, in her ignorant ambition, that she could make a good use of her position as her master’s daughter-in-law whenever she chose to do so. She knew now that she had blundered egregiously, and she laid all the blame on her young mistress. This was the second heavy grudge she owed her, not to speak of countless minor slights which Margot, by her careless unconcern, had given her maid cause to magnify or imagine.

For the moment, however, all her spite, all the malignity born of a useless humiliation (for Susan had her pride, and it had cost her something to say what she had said), vented itself upon Allen.

‘In love with her—with Miss Margot!’ she cried. ‘Well, I didn’t think you was so mean-spirited as that! Don’t imagine I’m jealous; I shouldn’t stoop to it. I only spoke as I did just now by way of joking-like, to see if you’d believe I meant it. But you to go and fall in love with Miss Margot! What next, I wonder? Can’t you see as she hates the very ground you walk on? It’s common talk below-stairs that she can’t bring herself to speak you civil; she won’t so much as look your way if she can help it. And you fancying she’ll come round! Why, she’ll be fit to jump for joy the day you go out of the house—like everyone else, for that matter. You’re nothing but a disgrace to the family; there’s none of us that has a good word to say for you, upstairs or below. As for me, if I could prevent you going by lifting up my little finger, I wouldn’t, so don’t you think it. I’ve too much contempt for you!’

He sat there breathless under this unexpected tirade, which Susan, perhaps for fear of an anti-climax, brought to an end by an abrupt exit. He did not take up the manual again—he had no heart for indigo just then. Susan’s spiteful candour had gone home. Would everyone be glad when he was gone? Did Margot detest him? No, he could not believe that; she *must* feel kindly towards him after what he had done for her, even if she dared not show it. And yet—what if Susan had spoken the truth? He could not stay in the library just then, and, as if it would be easier in the open air to dismiss the memory of her hateful words, he went out into the grounds and down to a small stone alcove at the end of one of the walks, where he sat down. Everything looked cheerless; the dull coppery sun sinking into a bank of grey haze behind the bare trees, the paths strewn with rime-edged leaves, the pinched shrubs and the misty distances, all combined to increase his depression; he felt as if he were already an exile.

Suddenly there was a soft patter of feet, a vigorous panting beside him, and then a great head was thrust under his arm, and

Yarrow's honest golden eyes were looking up at him in wistful sympathy. Allen broke down at this, as the collie laid a paw on his knee with a flourish, and began to make an ineffectual attempt to lick his face with a generous tongue. He threw his arm round the dog's neck and bent over his smooth head. 'You won't be glad when I'm gone, will you, old fellow?' he said aloud.

When he raised his blurred eyes he saw Lettice on the path before him with her hoop in her hand.

'Yarrow always finds you out,' she said; 'he won't stay with me if he thinks you're near.'

'Yes,' said Allen; 'we've always been friends; *he's* never turned against me.'

Lettice flushed. 'I shouldn't have turned, if—if you had been nicer. I kept friends as long as ever I could.'

'Well, you'll be rid of me very soon now, Lettie. I shan't trouble you much when I'm in India.'

'Don't you want to go to India?'

'I hate it,' he said, 'but I've got to go.'

'Are you going as a punishment—was it for going into Margot's room that day? did you break any of her things? You weren't to go to India before that, I know. And, oh, Allen, it was I who told mother—but only because she thought it was a robber.'

'It's all right, Lettice,' he said—he was anxious to prevent her from arriving at the truth, for his own sake as well as Margot's. 'That had nothing to do with it. I'm not going to India for anything I've done wrong—only, well, to be kept out of mischief.'

'Don't they have any mischief in India? It must be rather a horrid place,' said Lettice.

'You aren't sorry I'm going, are you?' he said.

'I wasn't at first,' Lettice confessed. 'I began to be a little sorry just now, when I saw you minded it so.'

'I want you to be a little sorry, Lettice; now and then. I—I dare say I don't deserve you should, but never mind that, I'd like you to be sorry all the same. And tell me, Lettice, do you think—is Margot sorry at all?'

'Well, you see,' said Lettice, who was considerate as well as conscientious, 'Margot has such a lot to think about just now, with poor Ida so ill. I don't think she has much time to be sorry about anything else.'

'But you don't think she's glad?' he persisted; 'say you don't believe that, Lettice.'

'Glad!' said Lettice, 'oh, no, Allen, she wouldn't be so unkind as that. You mustn't think such things. And, if you like,' she added, with a little hesitation, 'you can come down with me and see if the stream's frozen over yet. There was a little very thin ice early this morning.'

Allen accepted the olive-branch she tendered; it comforted him a little to think that he was not quite friendless, and so he spent the brief remainder of the afternoon with Lettice, who was soon

chattering away on things in general, and they came back to the house together as if the long-standing coolness between them had never existed. 'You aren't going away just yet, are you?' she said as she was going upstairs to take off her hat and cloak; 'we can have a walk every day till you go.'

And in the evening after tea she came and sat on the ottoman in the drawing-room, and nestled up beside him in a manner intended to show that he had quite regained her favour. 'Lettie, darling,' her mother said, with a little displeased movement of her eyebrows, 'surely there are other seats, without inconveniencing Allen!'

'I'm not inconveniencing him, mother,' said Lettice calmly; 'he likes me here.'

And indeed the confiding pressure of the dainty little figure against his shoulder, the mute caress with which she rubbed her cheek on his sleeve, sent a thrill to the heart of the poor Pariah, so long accustomed to disfavour and neglect.

He sat there in the firelight, not venturing to speak, for fear of saying, as he generally did, something which would draw down on him some scathing remark from his step-mother. Now and then he cast a grateful glance down on Lettice's half-shut eyes and tumbled chestnut locks.

Lettice little knew, in obeying the generous instinct that drew her to make a demonstration so unusual to her, what a work of mercy she was performing, or how the memory of that bright head against his shoulder would be with him through many a dark hour in time to come.

As usual, he saw nothing of Margot until dinner, and then she carefully avoided addressing him directly, or even, he fancied, meeting his eyes. There is no form of uneasiness more subtle and unsubstantial than such an impression in almost any case. Here it made these encounters one long torment to him; yet he found a fascination in them he could not resist.

That evening his heart was lighter. Might not his future be about to improve? Lettice had unexpectedly capitulated that day: who could say that Margot herself would not surrender? And his father had said nothing more about India lately. Could he have abandoned that idea? Anything seemed possible that night.

However, he was rudely undeceived. After Mrs. Chadwick and Margot had left the room, Chadwick sat drinking his wine in gloomy silence, and once or twice he seemed about to speak, and filled his glass again instead.

At last, with his eyes fixed on the fire, he said, 'I suppose you know you are to leave this on Monday?'

On Monday—and this was Wednesday! Only four days in which to see Margot—four days in which to enjoy Lettice's regained favour! He sat speechless, paralysed by the shock.

'I did think,' continued Chadwick in the same constrained tone, 'of leaving it till after Christmas; but there's no use in delay

that I can see, and I wrote to Macdonald last week and fixed the time. You'll go out by the "Chusan," which sails on Monday week, and you'll want a full week in town to get your outfit. I shall go up with you myself, and stay till I see you on board.'

This near approach of the worst he had been vaguely dreading made Allen desperate; he lost all sense of the awe he usually felt in his father's presence; the imminence of the danger loosened his tongue, and gave him an unwonted command of words.

'Father,' he said huskily, 'I must speak to you, even if it makes you angry. You don't know what going away is to me. I can't say it in the proper words, but give me just this one chance—don't send me away this time!'

Chadwick waved his hand impatiently. 'I don't want to listen to you,' he said; 'I've made up my mind, and it's too late to change now.'

'Not too late—you can do it now if you will, if only you will! And think, father, what shall I do out in India all alone, away from you all?'

'What other young fellows do—work, I suppose, and learn to be a man.'

'I'm willing enough to work, but not there, where I can never see anyone. I'm not like other fellows; I'm not fit for the life there—I can't take to it. When you first came home you told me you meant to make up to me for the life I'd led, and that I should be a companion to you, and live like a gentleman——'

'Whose fault is it if you haven't? Not mine.'

'I don't know,' said Allen; 'I've never been taught better. I seem to go wrong without meaning it. But why did you take me away from where I was and let me live in a house like this, and know what a home was—only to be sent away from it?'

'Good God!' said Chadwick irritably. 'Anyone would think you have given me no reason for acting as I do, to hear you talk!'

'I know you've got reasons,' said Allen humbly; 'I'm no credit to you, and never have been. And yet, if you'll only try and believe it, I'm not such an out-and-out bad fellow. I know how to behave better now, and I'll act different if you'll give me another trial—you needn't forgive me, only let me stay. It—it's the being sent away from—from everyone I care for that's so hard. After all, father, I am your son: don't turn me out of the house like your father did you. You've often said you can never forgive him for that.'

'That's enough!' said Chadwick harshly. 'You've got a tongue, it appears, when you like to use it. It's all very well your appealing to me like this, but I'm not the person with most cause to complain of you. There's your step-sister—there's Margot. How can I expect her to put up with your remaining here, after the way you've behaved?'

Chadwick was shaken; his first unreasonable pride and hope in his son had long been replaced by disappointment and disgust; he

had got it into his head that Allen was a sullen, vicious young cub, utterly devoid of common feeling or gratitude. This appeal of his had revealed the depth of emotion under that uncouth stolidity; the reference to his own father had struck a chord—for the first time he began to doubt whether what he was doing was in such accordance with parental justice, so manifestly the wisest and best thing to do, as he had come to consider it. And yet, after all, the boy was going to the bad at home; he was a constant source of dissension, anxiety, annoyance. Would not anyone say that a year or two spent in India might teach him manliness, self-reliance, all that he lacked so conspicuously? Then there was his wife; he knew what she would say if he went back now from his decision; his relations with her were not too harmonious as it was. He winced in advance under the cold silent displeasure he would have to bear from her, the bitter reminders if, as was likely enough, this unfortunate Allen relapsed afresh. Yet, somehow, he felt almost apologetic to him now, desirous of laying the responsibility on others, and it was this that inspired his reference to Margot. But Allen seized on it with a sudden hope, reading in it an unexpected chance of reprieve.

‘Tell me this!’ he pleaded, ‘if Margot was to say she forgave me, that she didn’t wish me to go, would you send me away still?’

Chadwick considered. ‘I’m a fool to let you talk me over like this,’ he said finally, ‘because I’ve not altered my own opinion. But if Margot came to me and said that, I don’t say I might not think over it. Only, mind this: if she’s against you, you go, and I won’t hear any more nonsense about it.’

‘If she’s against me I’ll go!’ said Allen; ‘but—but I don’t think she will be; and, father, I don’t know how to thank you, that I don’t!’

‘There will be time enough for thanks by-and-by,’ said Chadwick drily. ‘I’m by no means so sure that Margot will be so ready to overlook this. But we shall see to-morrow. And in the meantime—as I shall have to tell your step-mother what a fool I’ve made of myself—if you’ll take my advice, you’ll keep out of the way.’

It was a recommendation Allen was very willing to follow; he wanted to be alone to think over this wonderful piece of happiness that had come to him—a happiness all the more exquisite, perhaps, from a certain superstitious reserve that would not allow him to make absolutely sure of it.

But what a magical change had come over his prospects in the course of one day! Here he was, restored to Lettice’s good graces, with the distance between his father and himself considerably lessened, the sentence of banishment referred to one who best knew how little he deserved it. Ah! how bright a future might be before him yet!—a future in which he might repair all past mistakes, conquer all prejudices.

Margot was at breakfast the next morning; fresh and fair, and preoccupied as she had been of late. He looked at her face with

a new interest, as if to discover signs of hardness there. There were none in the broad white brow and the soft hazel eyes, nor in the lines of the mouth, which had lost its petulant and contemptuous curl of late. Even the pretty white hands seemed to touch everything with a sort of fastidious gentleness. She could not be hard to him alone!

She rose before breakfast was over to attend to Ida's. Chadwick called after her in his harsh, strident voice which made her start and shiver. 'When your sister can spare you, I want a word with you in my den—say about eleven.'

'Very well,' she said, in her low indifferent voice; 'I will come to you then.'

Mrs. Chadwick threw an anxious glance after her daughter as she left the room, and then observed, 'So you insist on leaving it to her to say whether all your plans are to be upset? I must say, Joshua, that anything more unpractical, more invidious, never—'

Chadwick looked up from his toast with a glance of sullen defiance. 'All right, Selina,' he said: 'I've had the benefit of knowing your sentiments already. If you're not satisfied with the result, settle it with Miss Margot—not me.'

Mrs. Chadwick took refuge in her letters, which quivered angrily in her hands; she evidently had a return of her doubts as to her daughter's firmness—another good omen for Allen!

He went down into the village that morning, to cheat, if he could, the time that would elapse before his fate was decided. It was one of those bright frosty November mornings, with a pale blue sky and a sparkle on ivied trunks and leafless boughs in the sunshine, which give the autumn landscape a pathetically fallacious look of spring.

As he walked along the hard village road he saw a sober little pony-carriage coming towards him, in which he recognised Millicent Orme. He was so full of his happiness that he could not keep it to himself just then; perhaps, too, he wanted to have his hopes confirmed by her opinion.

She saw that he wished to speak to her and stopped.

'Miss Orme,' he began shyly, and yet with a brighter look on his heavy features, 'you know what I told you the other day about my going to India?'

'Yes,' said Millicent kindly, for she felt a strong interest in this poor unpopular prodigal. 'You are getting to like the idea? I am so glad, Mr. Chadwick. I was quite distressed the other evening to see how unhappy it made you.'

'It's not that,' he said: 'I hate the idea as much as ever, but I believe—it's as good as settled now—that I shan't have to go! My father said last night that he wouldn't send me out if Margot had no objection to my staying, and I expect she's speaking to him about it now.'

'What a very odd way of deciding the thing!' was Millicent's

private reflection. 'Then of course it's all right!' she said gaily, 'and I needn't condole with you any more, Mr. Chadwick.'

'You *do* think it's all right, then?' he remarked eagerly. 'You don't think there's any chance of—of——'

'Of her insisting on your going? As if she could! Surely, Mr. Chadwick, you know her better than that. But I must say good-morning now: I've got to drive over to Tidford about my clothing-club, and I don't like to keep Pixie standing this cold weather.'

She drove off, leaving him with his last doubts removed. He walked on with a pleasure that was new to him in all the incidents of village life: the wheelwright painting a repaired wheel at the door of his work-shed, the carrier's cart with its brown tilt coming jolting by from Closeborough, the little small-paned shops, the rosy-faced cheery postman wheeling up his truck from the station, the battered grey tower of the church rising above the cheery, red-tiled roofs—he had never appreciated all this till now, when he had so nearly had to leave it all.

But at last his impatience to know made him turn back. He had not thought of it till then; but what if Margot had not only said the word that revoked his sentence, but cleared him from all suspicion too? The mere idea of such a possibility quickened his steps, but he would be content—more than content—with the lesser mercy.

On his way to the porch he passed the study window, and could not forbear from looking in. He was too early—the conference was still in progress; he could see Margot's tall slim form standing in the recess. She stood with her back turned to him, showing no more of her head than the nape of her stately neck and the upward sweep of dusky hair; her hands—those fair hands which held his fortunes—clasped behind her. His father was at his table listening, but Allen did not venture to look any longer—he went on into the house.

Then he waited in the music-room, with the door open so as to command the study, which was opposite. He had not waited many minutes when the study door opened. 'Then that's settled,' he heard his father say, with a decided accent of relief, and Chadwick came out into the hall.

Allen started up and went to meet him. 'Is it all right?' he asked eagerly; 'has she said "Yes"?''

'Eh?' said Chadwick hastily. 'So you've been in there, have you? I've no time to answer any questions now. Margot's in there—you had better go in and ask her.'

Allen required no further permission; reassured by something in his father's manner, he burst eagerly into the study and stood face to face with Margot.

CHAPTER IV.

TRUSTING TO A REED.

Hätt' ich dich doch nie gesehen,
 Schöne Herzenskönigin,
 Nimmer war es dann geschehen
 Dass ich jetzt so elend bin!
 Nie wollt' ich dein Herze rühren,
 Liebe hab' ich nie erfehlt!
 Nur ein stilles Leben führen
 Wollt' ich wo dein Odem weht.—*Heine.*

So for the last time she was gracious to him.

Pelleas and Ettarre.

ALLEN burst into the study, all excitement and gratitude, to find Margot still standing in the window recess. At the sound of his entrance she turned hastily, as if anxious to escape, and then, finding retreat cut off, stood her ground.

'It's all settled, then?' he cried. 'Margot, I knew you'd make it all right! What did you say?'

She threw up her head proudly: 'I said—what I was obliged to say,' she answered.

He felt checked by her tone: 'But you're not angry about it, are you, Margot?'

'Angry—no. But it was not fair to make me the judge—it was not fair.'

'Well, I don't know,' said Allen, in his slow, puzzled way; 'can't say I see why, but that don't signify now, and I'm all the more obliged to you for giving it in my favour, and I couldn't tell you how—'

'Stop!' she cried, with a gesture of impatient helplessness. 'Oh, why can't you understand, Allen? Why should I have to tell you that you have nothing to thank me for? Your father asked me if I was willing for you to stay at home—and I——' she stopped; her voice seemed strangled in her throat.

A dreadful fear came into his face, his jaw dropped, the change of expression would have been ludicrous but for the tragedy of it.

'You—said—I was to—go?' he asked slowly. 'Is *that* what you're trying to tell me? I don't believe it, Margot. You couldn't have said it!'

For all answer she turned away in silence.

'It's true, then. Perhaps you'll tell me this? Why should you want me away? What harm should I do you by staying here?'

'I am not obliged to give my reasons,' she said haughtily, 'but as you ask, I will tell you. I can't trust you, Allen. I can't feel that you may not at some time or other repeat——'

'You can't trust me!' he cried; 'you think I should ever say a single word—after all I've gone through! You make that a reason

for sending me away! When you know what I'm being sent away for—you know how I was led to do what I did, who put it into my head! Margot, you know it was you yourself! And now a word from you would keep me at home without anyone being wiser than they are now, and you—you refuse to speak it! I don't care who hears me say so—it was a cruel and wicked thing to do—a thing you'll repent of before you die, if you've any heart in you to feel!

She flushed hotly, her eyes darkened with anger. 'How could I know what would happen?' she cried. 'Is it my fault that I thought you were at least to be depended on to that extent? And you try to throw the blame on me—to make me responsible for your weakness. If I felt sorry—and I did—you kill any pity, any sympathy in me by such a contemptible plea as that!'

'Ah!' said Allen bitterly, 'all those fine words don't deceive me. You want me out of the way, and you'll stick at nothing to get rid of me. Very well, you needn't be afraid; I shan't hinder you, I shan't open my mouth. But at least you might spare your names. You know, and I know, that if there's one of us two that's contemptible and has cause to be ashamed, it's not me—no, by God it's not!'

'That is enough!' she said in ungovernable passion. 'I will not stay here to hear such words. Think what you please, say what you please, but I will listen to you no longer. Let me go, Allen!'

She looked so regal, so commanding in her rage, that he felt a great awe of her, a horror almost at his presumption in using such words to her. He was so completely subjugated that not even her cynical treachery and desertion of him, her anger, real or simulated, could make him despise her long. After that one outburst he could have fallen at her feet and implored her pardon. His devotion to her was of the dumb, dog-like kind which is only strengthened by ill-usage.

'Margot,' he said hoarsely, 'don't go yet—not in anger! Be a little fair to me. I—I don't know how it is, but you always manage to put me in the wrong somehow. When I said all that to you, I was mad—there was some little excuse for me. I'd expected it all to be so different. But I'd sooner bear anything than have you offended with me. If you say I must go away, I will—only don't let me go without a word of kindness, just to say you're sorry, and you won't forget that I'm going to save you unpleasantness—it wouldn't hurt you to say that, Margot, and it would put a little heart in a fellow!'

She was touched, even profoundly, by the utter humility with which he spoke; her lips quivered, her eyes grew soft with a mist of tears.

'You make me sorry when you speak like that,' she said brokenly. 'Allen, I would have been kinder to you if I could, but I could not help myself. I am not strong enough to—to do what perhaps I ought. Forgive me!'

He seized her hand and hurt it by the force he used. 'That's

all I wanted,' he said; 'I'd go through fire and water for you now. You can do anything you like with me, Margot, if you choose!'

She felt an instant reaction, a shrinking distaste for any further professions of this sort, which made her hand restless in his. 'And now, Allen,' she said, 'you will spare me any more of these scenes while you are here, will you not? They are too painful. Let us meet as usual, as if all this had not been.'

'And you won't keep away any more?' he pleaded. 'I've only three more days to see you in.'

'Ida has—has not liked me to leave her much,' she said, with a certain air of conscious insincerity; 'but if it will be any satisfaction to you, I will come downstairs in the evenings while you are here.'

'You know it will!' he said eagerly. 'Thank you, Margot.'

'Now I must go,' she said nervously; 'try not to think hardly of me, Allen.'

'I don't,' he answered; 'I never can.' And so she freed herself at last from an interview which had cost her much to go through.

As for him, in the first flush of enthusiasm, roused by her sudden softening, he forgot the collapse of all his confident hopes, he forgot the fate that he was now doomed to without further chance of relieve.

She had spoken to him kindly, he had seen her eyes sweet and bright with tears; she had asked pardon of him, he had held her hand in his—those were recollections which would accompany him to exile, and make even that endurable.

It is true that the reaction came in despair, in passionate clinging to the things he knew and loved, in black temptation to undo all his work, and keep the privilege of being in the same house with Margot. Sometimes he thought that even the penalty of her scorn and contempt would not be too much to pay; but what if he gave up the glow and glory of martyrdom, only to discover he had done it for naught—what if Margot refused to remain after her conduct was known? The dread of such a devil's bargain as that kept him true to his resolution through all.

As Margot, her nerves still vibrating from the tension of her recent ordeal, was on her way to her room, the door of her mother's boudoir opened cautiously, and, greatly as she wished to be alone just then, she could not disregard Mrs. Chadwick's summons.

'Well?' began Mrs. Chadwick breathlessly; and then, as she noted the girl's wearied, dispirited expression, she added sharply, 'Surely you have not been so foolish, so wickedly weak, as to give way?'

'Don't distress yourself, dear!' said Margot, with a mirthless, jarring little laugh; 'I have been firmness itself—he is going.'

Mrs. Chadwick caught her in her arms and kissed her rapturously. 'You good brave darling!' she cried. 'I was a little nervous lest you should be too tender-hearted to do what really is

wisest and best for everyone. Ah, my dear, I can't tell you the relief it is to me !'

Margot released herself with visible impatience. 'Don't, mother !' she said in a low voice ; 'don't *praise* me for it. I had to tell him myself—it was too dreadful ! I hate myself for not being able to——'

'Poor child !' said her mother ; 'it was cruel to expose you to such an ungrateful task. No one could expect you to intercede for him ; it would only be a mistaken kindness which you would bitterly regret at some time. Don't reproach yourself for what was so plainly your duty. And now, bathe your eyes, dear ; you will find some eau-de-Cologne on my dressing-table there. The Priory people are coming over to luncheon to-day, and I can't spare you.'

Half an hour later Margot was looking, and almost feeling, as if no disagreeable questions of conscience had ever disturbed her peace of mind. It was to late too struggle now—the thing was done and could not be retracted. 'What else could I do ?' she asked herself—a question to which, from such a quarter, a satisfactory reply could be safely expected.

In most civilised countries persons under sentence of death are allowed some indulgences as the fatal hour draws near ; and though Allen was condemned to transportation merely, he was treated with a decided increase of consideration during those last few days at Agra House.

Lettice walked with him, throwing her weight upon his arm at that acute angle which with small maidens is a sign of very close friendship ; she bestowed on him much good advice and information concerning India, gathered from random recollections from her geography books.

'I dare say you'll have an elephant all your own to ride on,' she said ; 'you'll like that, Allen—it isn't like riding on a *horse*, you know,' she added considerately. 'You sit in a sort of little pew on the top and shoot tigers in the jungalows. Papa shot lots that way. And another thing, Allen ; if you meet a tiger out walking, you've only to keep your presence of mind and he'll always turn away. Are you presence-of-minded ? You must practise it. Oh, and do you know that if you catch hold of a cobra by the tip of his tail he can't sting you ?—it's a useful thing to remember.'

Allen listened humbly, and somehow he did begin to look forward to a tropical life with more interest, with a sense of the importance he had gained in Lettice's eyes, so that her crude, childish notions and speculations were a sort of comfort to him.

And there were the evenings to look forward to—evenings to be spent in Margot's company. For she kept her promise : she appeared in the drawing-room now, instead of taking refuge with Ida. She spoke to him with a gentleness she had never shown

before; she played and sang for him of her own accord, as she had seldom deigned to do for his private delectation. He little knew what it cost her to do this, and how impatiently she longed for the end to come. Margot had forced herself to make him some concessions, from what she tried to explain to herself as humanity, from what her heart told her was the impulse to atone, in ever so small a way.

Allen was easily conciliated; the evenings where all too short for him. He tried to forget all but the bliss of the present moment; but as each evening closed and he sat up late smoking in the library alone, he awoke with a keener terror to the rapidity with which the last sands of his happiness were running out.

And towards the end, even the brief consolations on which he had reckoned were withheld in some respects. For on Saturday Reggie came home from school to spend the Sunday, and Allen waited in vain for that last ramble with Lettice through the woods and up to the Downs. Reggie had so much to tell her about his own exploits and adventures, and she was so proud of being chosen as the recipient of these wonders, that no doubt she forgot the companion whose conversation offered less novelty and excitement. And then Reggie would have been so offended if she had proposed to leave him, and he had always had a lordly contempt for his hulking step-brother. So the result was that Allen took his walk alone, and a dreary walk it was.

He went to church on the Sunday—a habit he had resumed of late. Margot was not there, having to attend on Ida, who was still in much the same condition.

He sat in the same seat as on that Sunday in April long ago, when he had been so hopeful and happy at finding himself actually in the same family as this Miss Chevening, who had once seemed so infinitely removed from him. How proud he had been of the stir they caused, of the way in which faces seemed drawn in their direction by some irresistible attraction! He had felt himself included—was he not one of them?

The home life which had looked so bright then had had its bitter disappointments, its slights and humiliations, and yet how absorbingly interesting the mere fact of Margot's presence had made it! He had never felt properly alive before, and away from her any existence would seem colourless by comparison.

The long-jointed stove by the font gave out the same dry stuffy odour as on that spring Sunday; the November sun struggled in through the latticed panes and threw a dull red glow on a portion of the old carved rood-screen; the effigy of old Sir Leovil Hotham stared down from his upper shelf with the same torpid hauteur; and his two stiff wives on the lower grades smiled still in placid inanity over the bas-relief, where four simpering sons knelt opposite five daughters in ruffs and wimples.

The congregation was the usual one: Sir Everard and his daughter, the Eddlestons, old Liversedge, the Admiral and his

family, all the Gorescombe 'notables,' and all the village faces he had learnt to know.

And they would be there next Sunday, and for many successive weeks to come; while he—where would he be?

Trite reflections enough; but Allen was not an original thinker. It is always a little surprising and painful to think that the absence which means so much to us will have no perceptible effect on the lives of those we are leaving.

The Vicar preached in his calm, silver-modulated tones; he had chosen for his subject Paul's departure from Miletus—'And they all wept sore . . . sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more'—a choice, needless to say, as accidental as it was inappropriate with regard to Allen. Yet Allen found himself drearily applying it to himself; not that he expected that anyone would either fall on his neck or weep, but wondering a little superstitiously whether they would indeed see his face no more.

And then he left off following the sermon, to indulge in almost the last bright prospect that remained now. Margot was intending to walk over to Lingford Church for the afternoon service, he knew. He meant to accompany her; he did not think she would object, and perhaps—perhaps now that all was settled, and she had no cause for reserve—she would give him some plain assurance that she was not insensible to the sacrifice he was making, that she was grateful for it and would not forget him while he was away. How proud he would feel if only she would make some such acknowledgment as that! He even fancied that she intended to do so, that she had planned this expedition for this very purpose.

He said nothing about his intention at luncheon, but before the time came when it was necessary to start he was ready in the hall, waiting to intercept Margot. Reggie came down and found him putting on his gloves.

'I say!' said Reggie, 'you're not going to Lingford, too, are you? You can't go with *us*—not with Margot and me and Lettice.'

Allen had not counted on the two younger ones being of the party—still, they would naturally walk on together; it would make no difference.

'Why, I shan't interfere with you,' he said. 'I shall walk with Margot.'

'As it happens,' said Reggie, 'we're going in the carriage, and there won't be room. I shall ask mother if you're to go!'

In the carriage! Allen's heart sank. Still, he must go; it would be something to be with her, even though the words he had hoped for would of necessity remain unsaid now. He followed Reggie into the drawing-room.

'Mother, Allen says *he's* going with us in the carriage—he can't, can he?'

'Allen, you know perfectly well the brougham will not hold four comfortably.'

'Couldn't Reggie go on the box, if he didn't mind?'

'Certainly not; he was coughing in church, and I don't want to send him back with his cold worse, poor boy; it is sure to be foggy driving home.'

'Then I'll go on the box,' he said—even that was better than nothing.

'Topham does not like having anyone sitting outside with him—it looks very bad. I really cannot see, Allen, why you should persist like this. Reggie naturally wants to see something of Margot while he is here, and I cannot remember that you were ever such an enthusiastic church-goer. You had much better stay at home and finish what packing you may have to do, instead of disturbing all our arrangements.'

'Yes,' said Reggie; 'we don't want you—any of us. I'm sure Margot doesn't. I haven't seen her all these weeks, and you come shoving yourself in.'

'Reggie, you mustn't speak to your step-brother in that way, it's not nice,' said Mrs. Chadwick. 'But you see, Allen, it really is out of the question—so pray let me hear no more about it.'

'All right,' he said heavily. Reggie's words had convinced him already—no, Margot did not want him—nobody did.

But he went out nevertheless, and after apparently aimless tramping over sodden heath and stiff-rutted yellow roads, he came round to the plateau on which Lingford Church stood with its conical grey shingled spire. Service had already begun; and he knew if he went in he would not be placed near Margot, and yet he lingered outside amongst the yellow-lichened headstones, which bent stiffly over their green mounds like aged invalids sitting up in bed.

There he waited, sometimes sitting in the porch by the fluttering blue notice-sheets with lists of shooting-licences and accounts of collections, sometimes walking round by the little trench under the walls to keep warm. And the last gash of pale salmon colour in the west faded out and the fog crept up the valley below, and the windows of the church became faintly luminous in the growing darkness, as he stood there listening to the low intoning within, the choral responses, the burr and vibrating swell of the organ, the cadences of the preacher's voice.

Then the sermon ended and they sang a hymn which was familiar even to Allen; it was 'Abide with me,' and the well-known air and words fell on his ear with a new and pathetic force as he stood under the chancel window—

When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Was it fancy that he could hear Margot's voice, clear and full, above the rest? He could picture her in there, between Reggie's handsome face and Lettice's sweet serious one, singing, her eyes unclouded by any thoughts of one whose comfort was fleeing, and whom she had failed to help!

Then the hymn ceased, and was followed by the solemn murmur of the benediction, and before any stir broke the silence he had turned away with a swelling heart, through the long grass, and home in the darkness.

No questions were asked as to how he had passed the afternoon. Margot imagined he had been to pay a farewell visit at the Vicarage, as, indeed, he ought to have done, for Millicent had taken the organ that morning, and he had not seen her since that meeting when he had been so mistakenly sanguine.

He never did pay that farewell visit—he felt he could not bear to tell Millicent that he was going after all.

‘Margot, how you sing?’ he asked that evening in the drawing-room.

‘With pleasure,’ she said; ‘what would you like me to sing?’

He hesitated—he was not religiously inclined, and felt more than a little awkward in making his request. ‘There’s a hymn,’ he said at last, ‘“Abide with me,” it’s called—I wish you would sing that.’

Margot herself was not given to devotional exercises, but she consented, with a little surprise at such a choice.

‘How funny that you should choose that particular hymn!’ cried Lettice, who enjoyed a coincidence; ‘it’s the very one we had at Lingford this afternoon!’

Allen made no comment; he sat in the shadow of one of the window recesses, as Margot took her seat at the piano with Lettice by her side; there he could take in the whole interior of the room like a picture—the two at the piano, with the candle-light giving a more delicate fairness to their faces, the mellow subdued light of the shaded lamps, the firelight playing on his step-mother’s handsome features, and on Reggie’s graceful young figure curled up on the stool at her feet. Ah! how soon that picture would be only a picture for him!

For some reason the singing came to an end after that one hymn. Allen did not ask her to continue, not having his voice under the best control at the moment, and after a pause Margot shut the piano thankfully, and his opportunity was past. Perhaps anything else would have been an anti-climax, would have blurred the impression for him. The children went to bed, Chadwick came in and discussed in a dreary practical way the arrangements for the morrow, and soon—too soon—Allen’s last evening of all had sped.

What was the meaning of the look in Margot’s eyes as they met his for one brief instant in saying good-night? Was it deprecating, compassionate, contrite—or all three? He read all that in their troubled depths, and not incorrectly. What he failed to see was the old inveterate aversion, which was there notwithstanding, latent and ashamed, but still to be divined by a clearer insight.

And now there was only one episode before him—the final parting—and, paradoxically enough, he looked forward even to that.

Might she not come out of her reserve at the last, and give him some sign, written or spoken, that in the future, when she had nothing to dread, when he came back—she would prove that she was not ungrateful, would reward him for the labour he was accepting in her cause? Wild or not, the hope gave a less sombre tinge to his waking thoughts, and so was of service.

CHAPTER V.

VESTIGIA NULLA RETRORSUM.

Bol. Your will be done : this must my comfort be
That sun that warms you here shall shine on me.

Rich. II.

I've heard that there is iron in the blood
And I believe it. Not one word? Not one!
Whence drew you this steel temper?—*The Princess.*

UNLUCKY Allen! Hard Fate pursued him even in the manner of his departure. A solitary outgoing lends the hero a certain impressiveness, invests him with a pathos, even when regrets are not deep nor lasting. But a triple departure with divided leave-takings is an arid and unsatisfactory affair. It was arranged that Reggie should go back to school by the same train as Allen and his father, and the young gentleman, demoralised by the short plunge into sybaritic home life, was so overcome by leaving, even for the short period that remained before the Christmas holidays, that he almost monopolised attention.

While they were endeavouring to comfort and encourage the boy, Allen went round unnoticed to the stables and took a sad leave of his friend Yarrow. Yarrow did not understand the reason of this unusual emotion in the least, but he had the tact to conceal it. His liquid golden eyes glowed with affection, he was lavish of an extremely muddy paw, and tugged at the chain of his kennel with a plaintive sound between a whine and a yawn which did duty for a fond farewell. 'Good-bye, old chap,' said Allen, with a rising lump in his throat.

Topham, putting the horses in the brougham close by, thought he might now suspend the contemptuous silence which he had observed towards Allen ever since his misuse of Hussar. 'That there dog 'ull miss you, Mr. Allen, sir.'

'He'll get over it soon enough,' said Allen, surly from emotion.

'Well, sir, dogs is dogs; they don't feel like Christians, in course,' said Topham, a little ruffled that his overtures were not received more cordially.

In his soreness Allen was thinking just then that he would be

well content if the Christian members of the family would cherish his memory as long and as affectionately as this poor indiscriminating collic, but the minutes were flying, he must go back to Margot.

In the hall Lettice met him. 'Why did you run away?' she said reproachfully. 'I have been looking for you everywhere. Isn't it *babyish* of Reggie to make all that fuss? What would he do if *he* was going to India, instead of you. I expect he would lie down and *scream*. I wanted to give you this, Allen; it's my present, and you must promise faithfully not to open it till you're quite alone.'

She put a small package tied up with ribbon in his hand. 'Don't let anyone see,' she whispered; 'put it in your pocket—quick! and promise.'

He promised; he felt ashamed of himself for his hard thoughts, especially when Lettice added, 'It *was* unkind of me to leave you alone as I did these last two days. Reggie being at home made me forget somehow, but I do wish I hadn't—tell me you didn't mind much!'

'No, Lettie,' he said, with an untruth that was surely forgivable, 'I—I didn't notice it.'

'I'm so glad,' she cried; 'I remembered it all at once in bed last night, and I *was* so miserable, because I am sorry you're going away—dreadfully sorry!'

Some of the servants had come up to the hall to see Allen go, more from a sense of the etiquette of the thing than any liking for Allen. Susan, as might be imagined, was occupied elsewhere, and did not take part in the ceremony.

Mrs. Chadwick was still coaxing and stuffing the inconsolable Reggie, Chadwick was giving directions about bringing down the luggage, Margot had disappeared. Allen went into the library in search of her, and found her at the window, watching the carriage as Topham brought it skilfully round the curve to the steps.

'Well, Margot,' he said, 'I'm going.'

She looked startled, uncomfortable. 'They have not put the luggage on yet,' she said for want of something better.

'No,' he said grimly; 'I've got that much time left me. Is that all you've got to say to me, Margot?'

'I—I hope you will be successful and—and happy out there,' she faltered.

'Happy!' he said. 'I don't feel as if that was very likely. Will you write to me sometimes, Margot—may I write to you?'

She coloured painfully. 'No, Allen,' she said, 'forgive me if it seems unkind, but—but I see no use in my writing to you, or you to me. We shall hear of one another through your father.'

'Are you afraid I shall put in anything about—what has passed between us?' he said clumsily. 'You needn't be.'

An angry fire shone in her eyes. 'I don't wish to write or be written to, Allen; is not that enough?'

'Oh, plenty!' he said bitterly; 'you're determined to save yourself all you can, but it don't strike me as fair, Margot, for all that!'

'Fair or not,' she retorted, 'I do not wish it. If my wish has no weight with you——'

'You know it has!' he cried; 'why else am I going at all? It's cruel to say that now. . . . Margot, you won't part from me in anger? It's more than I can bear.'

'Why did you provoke me?' she asked more gently; 'why do you press me for what I cannot give? I *am* sorry for you, Allen, as sorry as you can expect me to be, but you must accept things as they are; it is best. When you have shown more plainly that you are to be trusted——'

'Have not I shown that yet?' he cried.

'How can you ask, when you have still to be tried? But you will be brave, Allen, you will let what is past be forgotten, will you not?'

'By God, I will!' he cried fervently. As always, he could not withstand her long when she chose to speak fair words to him. He was her slave. 'Shake hands upon it, Margot.'

She surrendered one hand to him, but it glided out of his almost immediately.

'Look sharp!' cried Chadwick's voice from the hall; 'we've no time to lose.'

Margot followed to the porch. Mrs. Chadwick wisely did not in parting from her step-son affect more than an unemotional concern, a sorrow that he had not made it possible for her to be more sorry; her good-byes were interspersed with encouraging arguments to Reggie and commissions to her husband.

A last touch of Margot's hand, a last hug from Lettice, a respectful hope from the irreproachable Masterman that he would 'find himself comfortable out in India,' and Allen was in the carriage with the still tearful Reggie and his flurried, irritable father.

Then came a brief glimpse of the group on the porch-steps—Mrs. Chadwick smiling and kissing her hand to Reggie, not him; Margot leaning against a pillar, with a look of strain and tension in her face; Lettice clinging to her in quiet grief, the solemn faces of the servants banked up behind, and the carriage started with a jerk from the impatient horses, and the glimpse was gone for ever.

'We shall only just do it!' said Chadwick, taking out his watch. 'For Heaven's sake, Reggie, don't snivel like that, you'll be home again in a couple of weeks or so.'

When Margot was in the morning-room, she let her arms fall to her side with a long sigh of intense relief. 'At last!' she said. 'Oh, mother, I thought Allen would never go!'

It was Lettice who heard, for her mother had lingered outside. 'Margot!' she cried, 'how unkind—when he was so sorry to go!'

'I did not mean you to hear, darling,' said Margot flushing;

‘you don’t understand—it is not that I don’t feel for him, poor fellow—only one can’t help being glad to get it over.’

‘I’m not,’ said Lettice stoutly, ‘and I don’t mean to be, Margot.’

What with the dismal preoccupation of the journey, of the sight of the familiar foggy London streets, and of the dinner with his father in the big hotel, Allen thought no more of Lettice’s packet until he was undressing that night, when he came upon it. Years seemed to have passed since it was first put into his hands. He undid the ribbon with reverent tenderness. The parcel contained photographs of the Chevening family—they were all there—inno-cent Lettice had made no exceptions. There was his step-mother, upon whom the camera had produced the expression she wore in church; Ida, pretty and lackadaisical; Reggie; Lettice herself, whose childish charm and natural grace had escaped all suggestion of posing or affectation; even Yarrow was included, with his honest head on one side, looking at the operator with sagaciously observant eyes and decidedly puzzled ears; and, last of all, he came upon a likeness of Margot herself, in the summer dress she wore at Trouville, and with the expression on her face he knew best and wished most to remember.

He stood there a long time, looking at the lovely face, enigmatic for all its frank *insouciance*. He had not dared to ask for this. Lettice’s thought had been a happy one—or stay, was it all Lettice’s, or had not *she* some part in it? If so, what significance, what hope lay in this simple gift! With the powers of self-delusion we all have, and should be so much more miserable without, he ended by believing that this parting present had been inspired by Margot, that she meant it as a message of much that she could not say.

If he could have known the aspect in which she really regarded him, the feelings with which at that very moment she was laying her head on her pillow—miles away in Pineshire—he would have been cured perhaps of his folly. One may be the wiser—seldom the better—for a fairideal shattered, a delusion rudely dispelled.

A day or two after Allen and his father had left Agra House, Margot received a rather mysterious little note by hand from Millicent Orme, begging her to come in that afternoon, as she wished particularly to see her alone.

So, at the appointed hour, Miss Chevening entered the faded Vicarage drawing-room, where Millicent was expecting her. It was a shabby room, where no attempt had been made to follow the latest decorative crazes; some Italian photographs in Oxford frames and some old family portraits hung on the walls, the chintz on the furniture was almost colourless, and the furniture itself of a stiff, uncompromising order of construction, and yet there was that nameless air of refinement over everything which comes not of upholstery.

Millicent, who had been preparing somewhat nervously for this

interview, felt reassured as Margot came in, so bright and animated, so frankly and evidently at peace with herself and the whole world, that she could not help exclaiming as she took her visitor's hands and kissed her—

'How happy you are looking to-day, dear Margot!'

'Am I?' said Margot, smiling down on her. 'I am beginning to find life less of a burden. Ida is so much better to-day. Dr. Seaton thinks she will be able to go away very soon now. We are going to send her to Cannes for the rest of the winter with Miss Grey—an old governess of ours. Ida seems quite to like the idea. Mother won't spare me, and perhaps it is better. And now, what was it you wanted to see me about, Millicent?'

'I hardly know how to ask you, now you have come,' said Millicent.

'Ah, you want me to take one of those dreadful classes at the Sunday-school! Not again, Millicent; not after my fearful fiasco!'

'You only tried once.'

'Ah—but that once. Millicent, I took those boys on the parable of the vineyard, and I asked them if they could tell me who was meant by "the heir." And a terrible youth shot out his hand with a smirk and said, "Legal inheritor of the property, Miss!" I was crushed. And they would ask questions I couldn't answer for my life.'

'You should tell them to look it out for themselves and bring you the answer by next week,' said Millicent. 'I do—they invariably forget. But it isn't that, Margot.'

'Thank goodness!' said Miss Chevening, unwinding her long boa. 'Bucolic boyhood is not at all in my line. Do you want me to visit some of your old women? If you can guarantee that they will have nothing the matter with them they will insist on showing, I don't mind. Or I'll sing for you anywhere.'

'No, no,' said Millicent, a little timidly; 'it was about something I heard in the village.'

'Well,' said Margot, 'go on Millicent.'

'Is it really true that your brother Allen is going to India?'

'He's not my brother, you know, Millicent,' said Margot. 'Before I answer any questions about anybody, I really must ask you for some of that tea. I'm quite ravenous.'

'Oh, Margot!' cried Millicent, 'what am I thinking of?'

'I forgive you, dear. See, I am going to help myself. Where do you manage to get these delicious tea-cakes—not in Gorsecombe, surely?'

Millicent was not quite sure how far this assumption of the *gourmande* was genuine, but for the next few minutes she devoted herself to her duties as hostess. Margot always fascinated her afresh every time they met. Millicent had the heartiest, most ungrudging, admiration for her beautiful friend.

'No—really no more,' said Margot, who, however, had not displayed the appetite she had vaunted. 'If Lettie had been here, I

should not have dared to be so greedy. And now, Millicent,' she added, leaning back with a little frown, 'about Allen. Surely you knew that he was leaving for India before this? It has been settled quite a long time.'

'I knew that; yes—but I understood that he would not go after all.'

'Indeed? Who told you that, dear?'

'Your step-brother himself. He said it rested entirely with you, and he seemed so sure of your decision!'

There was a latent impatience, uneasiness, in Margot's manner. 'He said that? What else did he tell you?'

'Only that. Then—it isn't true? I am so glad. I have been hoping it wasn't!'

'Why be glad, why hope, why be interested at all, Millicent?'

'I can't help feeling a strong interest in him, poor fellow! He seemed so heartbroken at having to go, so happy at the thought of staying. I never did believe all the things that were said against him, and he has been so much steadier lately.'

'Ah,' said Margot mockingly, 'you have a weakness for the black sheep, dear. Unfortunately, I can't share it.'

'Don't say those cynical things, Margot. I know you don't mean them! And do tell me—is it true?'

'What perseverance! Is what true? That Allen is going to India? Perfectly. He is in London at this moment, I believe, but his ship sails on Monday.'

'He is to go, then? But—was it left to you to decide, and did you say he must go?'

'My dear Millicent, you make me feel like one of your little Sunday-school girls! What if I said "Yes"—would you be very scandalised?'

'I can't believe it. You wouldn't be so unkind—it is not like you.'

'You *will* put me on a pinnacle, dear; it's your own fault if I slip down. You had better know the worst of me,' said Margot defiantly. 'I was asked. I said "No"—there!'

'Then it was most cruel!'

'Ah,' said Margot, with an angry flush, 'you very good people never see more than one side of a case. I should not have thought myself that there was any cruelty in wishing that he should go away where there would be some chance of his living creditably, instead of leading the existence he did at home.'

'He was trying—trying hard—to live creditably, poor fellow! And he thought so much of you, Margot; you could have helped him so! Nugent always said that was the one chance for him. I don't know what he will say when he hears.' Millicent, with all her good intentions, was a little deficient in tact, though possibly the most perfect tact would not have availed her much better just then.

'It is very good of your brother to have so high an opinion of my influence,' said Margot haughtily; 'but I am sure that he at

least would not venture to condemn me whatever I have done, when he cannot possibly know the circumstances!’

‘What circumstances? Won’t you tell me, Margot?’

‘Really this is too much!’ cried Margot petulantly; ‘you will drive me away with all this catechising and cross-questioning. I warn you I am not a meek person, Millicent; you are asking what you have no right to know—what I certainly shall not tell you.’

‘Ah, Margot, I have offended you; don’t think me impertinent, you know it is not mere curiosity that makes me press you like this. I want you to think a little, to have some pity, some consideration, for that poor fellow. I know he is not all he might be, that you must find him trying at times, but think what you are doing in letting him be sent away against his will, far away from everyone he cares about. He is not strong-minded or clever, he is not likely to succeed, or wish to succeed, with no one near to care whether he fails or not. If you had seen him when he was telling me he was to go—and the last time when he was in such hope—Margot, it *does* seem so heartless in you to be sitting there so indifferent, so light-hearted even, after what you have done!’

Margot rose and threw out her supple hands with a passionate gesture. ‘Do you suppose I felt nothing?—that I haven’t tried, yes, tried hard, Millicent, to find some other way? Do you think I don’t regret it, that I shall not regret it again at times? You are wrong, Millicent, if you do. It was a strain, a terrible strain while it lasted. If I seemed light-hearted just now, well, it is my nature. I can’t feel things very long at a time. I can’t pretend to feel when I don’t. It is settled, right or wrong, and I can’t retract if I would.’

Millicent threw her arms round the girl’s waist. ‘If you are sincere in your regret, if you have really struggled, make just one more effort and conquer! Dearest Margot, listen to the voice that tells you you have been wrong. Whatever there may be to forgive, to bear, forgive while there is time. Don’t—don’t incur the awful responsibility of a ruined life which you might, if you only would, have rescued! You will do it! Tell me you will do it.’

‘What is it you want me to do?’ asked Margot, with more indecision than she had hitherto shown.

‘It is not too late,’ urged Millicent; ‘he has not sailed. Write, telegraph to his father that you have changed your mind, that you wish him to stay. If he was willing to listen to you before, he will listen now—even now, at the eleventh hour. See, here is paper. I will send the telegram for you myself, and you can write at the same time!’

‘No, Millicent,’ said Margot. ‘You are good—too good for me; but you don’t understand. I can’t recall him now. I don’t want him recalled. Never mind why—it is so.’

‘Then God forgive you, Margot! You will wish some day with all your soul that you had listened to me now.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Margot. ‘What is done is done. If I have been wicked, I am ready to bear the consequences. In my place,

Millicent, even you might find it no easier to be good—don't think too hardly of me, dear !'

'I do think hardly of you—you make me !' cried Millicent. 'I admired you, loved you so much, and now I can never think the same of you again !'

'You give me up ?' said Margot wearily. 'Well, if you must ! And now I suppose you will have nothing but hard things to say of me ?'

'I shall say nothing against you,' said Millicent. 'No one has any right to hear what you have told me—you ought to know me better than to think I should gossip about what pains me so much. Only we cannot be the friends we were.'

'If you say not,' agreed Margot. 'And now—let me go, Millicent.'

Millicent did not try to detain her, nor did she offer to kiss her at parting ; she stood by the fireplace, too sorrowful and embarrassed, too indignant at her friend's wilful hard-heartedness, to have heart for any hollow civilities just then.

To Margot, accustomed to be made much of, even by her own sex, this change from Millicent's usually effusive warmth was a startling indication of how far she had fallen in her friend's opinion.

Her self-love was still tingling under the blow as she passed up through the feebly-lighted village with the shafts of lamplight striking out from shop doors and windows into the foggy gloom.

'Why did I tell her ?' she was thinking. 'I suppose I could not very well help it—but how frightfully near I was to giving way—actually writing what she wished ! If I had—if I brought him back now—ah ! it won't bear thinking of ! To have him here again, to be exposed to what I know would come sooner or later—no, nothing can be so bad as that, whatever Millicent may say. She doesn't know ! But I have lost her, and I liked Millicent. Now I suppose she will hate me. She will not tell *him*, though ; at least, I think not—she said almost as much. I am glad of that. As to the rest—well, I must learn to put up with it. I could not do anything else but what I did, I *could* not ; and to give way now when the worst is over, why, it would be madness !'

To assure oneself emphatically that the course taken was the only possible one is usually tantamount to an admission that there was at least an alternative open. But if Margot recognised that in secret, it did not change her purpose now, it is so much easier to persist passively than actively. The mere thought of Allen's return thrilled her with repugnance, with a sort of dread of the consequences—she had but to be silent and he would go.

So no message came to deter Chadwick from his intention, and Allen and his father stood a few days later on the deck of the 'Chusan,' exchanging those last words, which were even more difficult to get decently said than most last words.

'You see,' said Chadwick, as they leaned over the rail apart

from the bustle, 'I'm sending you out as a gentleman, in spite of what's happened. I've supplied you with ample money to get all you can need in Bombay. I might have left that to Macdonald. But mind,' he added, 'no tricks with him. He'll keep a pretty sharp eye on you—he's had the hint from me.'

The few days of constant intercourse had of necessity brought the pair into more natural relations. Chadwick had relaxed his austerity, and made no allusions to the past. Allen felt some of his old timid affection and admiration for this masterful, liberal-handed (for Chadwick could spend money freely when he chose) father of his, in spite of the harshness of his treatment.

Something in these last words, however, struck Allen with a humiliating suspicion. 'Do you mean,' he said, looking down on the thick green water, 'that you've told him why I'm being sent away?'

'Macdonald has been with me several years,' said Chadwick, a little awkwardly. 'I have no secrets from him—naturally.'

'Then—you *did* tell him?' said Allen, with a sullen blackness gathering on his face.

'Well, yes, if you must have it, I did,' was the answer. 'What difference does it make to you? You can't expect me to treat you as if you were to be trusted just yet!'

'I didn't think you'd have told—but it don't signify now,' said Allen; 'and—and—when will you take me back?'

'It's early to speak of that,' said Chadwick, 'before you have even started. I shan't have you back till I hear you are in a position to make your own way, making money instead of spending it. If you're steady and have decent luck, you may, with Macdonald at your elbow, make a very good thing of those concerns out there—anyway, I've given you your opportunity. But don't expect me to open my doors to you unless you come back with something to show for the time you've been away. There, I don't want to use hard words now—there's the bell ringing. Good-bye, and let me hear that you're trying to do better.'

'Good-bye,' said Allen mechanically; 'and, father, you'll give Lettice and—and Margot my love when you get home to-night?'

'Yes, yes, I'll tell them, if I think of it—good-bye.'

They shook hands and parted, Chadwick going on shore with a doubt whether, after all, he need have been so frank with Macdonald. 'But it will keep the boy steady,' he reflected, 'to know there's an eye on him.'

Allen stood on the deck as the big ship churned her way down the Thames. Two ideas held possession of him. He was not to hope to come back, to see Margot again, until he was making money. Macdonald—the man with whom he was to live, who was to instruct him how to fulfil this condition—had been informed that he was a thief!

And here he passes from our view for a while, going out heavy-

hearted to his undeserved exile, which he could have spared himself, as another could have spared him, by a word.

Obstinacy, pride, and that chimerical half-hope of his had kept him silent, and, now his sacrifice was accomplished, he felt a great doubt, a great despair. He was still only beginning to count the cost of what he had done. A great fool—this inarticulate, impressionable, muddle-headed Allen—and yet the nature which was capable of such folly could not have been utterly ignoble, and might so easily have been saved from sinking, if one person had not chosen deliberately to hold back, and see him borne away.

CHAPTER VI

THE BEST THING FOR EVERYBODY.

I will redeem all this
And, in the closing of some glorious day,
Be bold to tell you that I am your son.

Hen. IV. Pt. 1, A. 8.

THE weeks that succeeded Allen's departure were weeks for Margot of profound calm and peace. With him the disturbing element seemed to have been eliminated; she was no longer jarred by a perpetual false note, the new dread he had begun to inspire was gone. She had not now to be perpetually on her guard, the reproach of his dull misery was not visible, day by day, hour by hour—she had nothing further to fear from her own weakness. And things went better at home, too. Her step-father was quieter, less carping and irritable. So far from resenting the part his wife and daughter had taken, he was secretly almost grateful to them for enabling him to escape from a difficult position without scandal or any appearance of harshness. Ida was away at Cannes, under Miss Grey's charge, and already she seemed, from the accounts of her, to be slowly recovering tone, and emerging from the unnatural torpor and apathy which the shock she received at Bournemouth had left. Up to the very last she had never referred to the past, and Margot had scrupulously refrained from forcing her confidences. Ida would soon see the folly of taking Camilla Henderson's deceit and desertion so tragically; it was only ill-health and hyper-sensitiveness that made her do so at all, and when she came home again, there would be no Allen to ruin her nerves by stupid petty persecutions, as it seemed he had been doing. Yes! when she thought of that, she felt justified. She seemed to herself to have been less influenced by her own personal interests and prejudices; all ugly whispers of her conscience were silenced—yes, he deserved it; it would have been weakness to have acted otherwise than as she had done.

As Christmas came on, she found herself brought into constant contact with Millicent Orme; there were church decorations, school-feasts, carol-singing, from which she could not withdraw. But, though Millicent was changed, the difference was imperceptible to all but Margot, who soon came to accept it as a minor and inevitable evil which it was easy to forget in the consciousness that, in Gorsecombe generally, and the neighbouring houses, her presence was becoming in growing request. It was pleasant to her to be received with universal homage wherever she and her mother appeared—at a meet, a skating party, or a dance—to have a consoling consciousness that few people would find it possible to condemn her, even if they knew what she had told Millicent.

Would Millicent's brother be as severe? He was coming down for a few days at Christmas—she would be sure to meet him. Would he ask inconvenient questions, call her to account? She had disregarded his opinion about the uselessness of sending Allen to college, and the result had proved him right—what would he say now? Well, let him say what he pleased, let him withdraw his friendship—what did she care? His displeasure or disapproval could not affect her. If he presumed to take her to task, she would show him once for all that she would suffer no interference. Nevertheless, this indifference of hers did not prevent her from feeling decidedly nervous on their first meeting. But his manner reassured her—impossible to doubt that he was glad to see her, that so far he was in no critical mood. It was only a brief greeting, a few words during the walk home on Christmas Day, but it was enough to reassure her for the present. It was not till some days later that she had any lengthened conversation with him. The Eddlestons were giving a Christmas party.

'You must come,' Fay Eddlestone had said to Margot; 'we're not going to have any children, and we're all going to be babies and play games.'

Nugent Orme, who was one of the invited, arrived rather late, to find the unfortunate Fanshawe, with his eyes bandaged, puffing frantically at a bust on a bracket under a delusive impression that he was blowing out a lighted candle, which Miss Chevening was holding, as she stood in the centre of the room, watching his performances from a distance with calm and rather malicious appreciation.

Orme was more impressed than ever by her singular beauty and distinction. There were pretty girls in the room, but they seemed provincial beside her, her slight, half-pitiful, half-disdainful smile made their laughter hoydenish by comparison.

She saw him standing in the doorway, and threw him a glance of recognition, with a charming upward movement of her chin as if she wished him to understand that she declined to be held responsible for her part in the proceedings; and presently the curate was unbandaged at her intercession, and she retired from office.

As she stood aside during the animated discussion of rival forms

of diversion that followed—everyone loudly advocating some capital game that no amount of explanation could make comprehensible to the rest—Nugent made his way to her.

‘Did you know Mr. Fanshawe could be so amusing?’ she asked.

‘Poor Fanshawe! How many victims have been sacrificed to provide mirth!’

‘It isn’t fair to come late,’ she declared, ‘when we are all steeped to the lips in frivolity. How much more childish grown-up people can be than real children at this sort of thing! Children always have a feeling that there’s something unnatural and wicked in playing games in their best frocks. We have thrown all our dignity to the winds long ago.’

‘I can’t quite imagine you taking a very violent share in these exercises,’ he said, with a half-glance at her unflushed cheeks.

‘You were not here, you see. And really, it would have been too barbarous to stand looking on while the Admiral and both the Miss Malkins and a whole host of quite elderly people were sitting on the floor, trying to blow a feather across a table-cloth. Wouldn’t it?’

‘Clearly,’ he agreed; ‘but what are they all doing now? It seems a comparatively mild form of revelry.’

It did; the company were seated on chairs in a circle, solemnly passing a table-spoon from one to the other, each recipient having to answer the question—‘Crossed, or Uncrossed?’

‘The chief beauty of that,’ she explained, ‘is that it makes people so angry when they find out the catch. See how red the Admiral is getting—he has said “Crossed” the first round, and “Uncrossed” the second, and been wrong both times. He thinks he has found out now, and that it depends on whether the spoon is offered to him by the bowl or handle. Poor deluded old gentleman!’

‘And what *does* it depend on?’

‘Simply on the position of the questioner’s feet. *Isn’t* it ridiculous? There, the Admiral won’t play any more till he is told what he’s playing at—the spoon is beginning to pall already.’

‘And what will come next? Not,’ he said, with genuine apprehension, ‘*not* Dumb Crambo?’

‘We have long passed the Dumb Crambo stage,’ she said; ‘I think there will be a lucid interval now. From the expression in Pussy Eddlestone’s eye, I feel almost certain she is going to recite “Curfew shall not ring to-night.”’

‘You call that a lucid interval?’

‘Well, it will cool people down. But I am wrong. Mrs. Eddlestone is collecting victims for some new imbecility—you will have to join, Mr. Orme.’

‘I draw the line at having to go down on my hands and knees, then,’ he said, ‘and I invariably cheat when I am blindfolded.’

And Nugent, much against his will, had to relinquish Margot’s society for a lively, but not highly intellectual, pastime known as ‘Tibbets,’ which consisted in passing a paper-weight from hand to

hand under a table-cover, and guessing at a given moment in whose hand it was concealed.

At last the fate to which a party on these principles is always liable was fulfilled in this instance. Some weaker brother in a guilty and anonymous fashion proposed dancing, an accomplice played the opening bars of a waltz, and, as if by magic, the room was cleared and several couples revolving before the elder people had fully realised that, as far as they were concerned, the evening was over.

'Will you give me this?' Margot heard Nugent asking her with some eagerness, and she felt a secret triumph as she assented—he at all events did not think so very badly of her.

She recognised with satisfaction that he danced well, and that she might resign herself to his steering without dread of disaster, but, before they had made many turns, her pleasure was rudely dispelled by a remark of his.

'So I hear Allen is on his way to India?' he said. His tone was casual enough, and yet Margot had a sudden misgiving—an utterly unfounded one—that his carelessness was assumed, that he had heard something, and had asked for this dance with a view to finding out the truth from her own lips. She was thankful that she need not let him see her face. 'Why was it,' she wondered, 'that this miserable Allen was for ever coming between them?'

'Yes,' she said; 'who told you?'

'My sister.' Margot made a sign to stop. Millicent had told, then; what folly it had been to make that unfortunate admission! She would have given much to be able to go on dancing, but she felt it impossible just then.

'One can't talk with any satisfaction and dance too,' she said; 'suppose we sit down in this window-seat—oh, I would rather talk, really.'

He could do nothing but agree, the window-seat was a place in which conversation could be carried on without fear of interruption or disturbance; she sat there silent for a moment, with a hard brightness in her eyes.

'Let me see,' she said, 'what were we talking about? Oh, about Allen. Did Millicent tell you why he went?'

'She didn't seem to know much about it,' he said. 'I thought you would give me some information, perhaps. It seemed such an odd notion of his to take up indigo-planting in that sudden way.'

Margot's suspicion vanished; he spoke in such palpable good faith that she was convinced that, after all, Millicent had kept her own counsel, which was a guarantee that she would continue to keep it. He thought it was Allen's own idea—why should she not let him remain under this impression?

'What is there so very odd about it?' she said.

'Well, he can hardly know much of the business, can he?'

'As much as most people who go out. And there is the agent

there. Surely it is better for him to be leading an active, industrious life than idling at home, Mr. Orme ?'

'Then you had some share in bringing it about ?'

For an instant her suspicion returned—was there some covert irony in his words ?

'What do you mean ?' she said.

'Why, that I presume his father required a little persuasion to consent to such a plan, and that you spoke in favour of it. Am I wrong ?'

'I did speak in favour of his going,' she said. 'Have you any fault to find with that ? If you have, please say so.'

'Fault ?' he cried. 'Good heavens, no ! What right have I to find fault ? It was a healthy sign that Allen should want something to do, and, if only the fancy lasts, it may be the best thing for him.'

'I meant—do you blame me ?'

'Blame you ? On the contrary, I wish I could tell you how good I think it was of you to enter into his feelings, to interest yourself in getting his father to consent.'

There was no mistaking the sincerity of his eyes and voice as he said this, but she shrank inwardly under it as if at the keenest sarcasm. So far as was possible, she would not be a hypocrite ; he need not, must not, know that she had sent Allen to exile against his will, in spite of his passionate entreaties, but at least she would not accept praise from his lips.

'Don't say that,' she said quickly, 'when you know how I used to speak and think of him !'

'I know,' he said ; 'but I know, too, what efforts you made to conquer your feelings, and how you succeeded.'

She felt irresistibly impelled to shake this excessive faith in her, to be as candid as she dared, without telling the whole truth.

'Did I ?' she said. 'Ah, you don't know ! Mr. Orme, what would you say if I told you I was *anxious* for him to go—for—for my own sake as much as his ?'

Nugent was touched ; he only saw in all this the self-reproach of a wayward but sweet nature, for a prejudice which was natural enough—she seemed more lovable, more human, in this softened mood.

'Even then,' he said, 'I suppose you could not help it. You are so different from him, poor fellow ! You could not be expected to do more than bear with him, to help him to better things. And that you have done.'

'I *do* want him to do well !' she urged eagerly, as if for her own satisfaction. 'I should be wretched if he were to fail now.'

'Do you suppose I doubt it ?' he said ; 'and, depend upon it, he feels that too, the knowledge of it will do more than anything else to keep him straight.'

'And you think he will succeed—will be happy there ?' she questioned.

'I think there is every chance of it,' he said. 'The life is his own choice, he will have plenty to do and fewer temptations to go wrong—there will be the sense of responsibility to steady him. I am sure there is no reason why you should make yourself unhappy. You, at all events, have done your best for him.'

'I like to hear you say that,' she said, 'even if—and you won't let anything make you think very badly of me, Mr. Orme? I want you to promise that.'

It needed some effort on Nugent's part to restrain some desperate assurance which would reveal his passion. But he dared not risk offending or alarming her. He had no right at present to be more than her friend; he would not forfeit that position by any rashness.

'There is no need to promise,' he said; 'nothing can ever do that; still, since you wish it, I promise.'

'You must not forget,' she said, and the next moment she seemed to have thrown off all troublesome thoughts with the ease and suddenness of a child. 'How seriously we have been talking!' she said; 'it is silly to trouble about what cannot be helped now. Shall we finish this waltz—we shall have time for one or two turns if you care about it?'

She said no more about Allen; for the remainder of the evening she was her light-hearted, careless self, fascinating as she always was and could not but be in his eyes, though he preferred her in her graver mood.

He walked back to the Vicarage with Millicent, speaking very little of that evening's festivities, and of Miss Chevening not at all. His love, which had hitherto been of a visionary, unpractical kind, with which his eye had had more to do than his judgment, had just begun to seem real and actual. Why should he not hope? She did not care for him as yet—how should she? but she did not treat him as an ordinary acquaintance. Henceforward the thought that he might one day succeed in winning her heart should be something more than a dream, he would set it before him as a possibility to be realised—which his whole happiness depended upon his realising.

Perhaps, even then, Margot was very far from being indifferent to him; with all her self-will, she was capable of feeling a woman's delight in submission to a stronger nature, and there was an impression of power and character in what she knew of Nugent Orme that had attracted her from the first. Nor was she blind to the fact that he admired her, that if she chose he would be at her feet. But now she became afraid of allowing herself to drift. Why did Nugent persist in thinking her so much better than she was? She was almost angry with him for not reading her more truly. If she let herself love him and he were then to learn the truth—what then? She knew very well that there would be no weakness in his love. She had deceived him as she had not deceived Millicent; she would have to tell him, humble herself before him, perhaps see him turn from her—ah, no! she would not expose herself to these unneces-

sary humiliations. She would stifle any dangerous tendencies while there was time; it would cost her little as yet to cast him out of her thoughts, nothing in comparison with what it might in the future.

And so on the only other occasion when she met him before his return to town, he found her altered to him in a manner which he felt, though he could scarcely define the change. He accepted it without betraying any discomposure, and made no effort to resume a more intimate footing; but he went back to chambers slightly disheartened, though very far from despairing.

'He doesn't really care for me after all,' thought Margot, when she heard he had gone. 'If he had, he would have come up, just to say good-bye. I am glad. I *want* him not to care!'

Susan's mind had been greatly exercised as to the real reasons for Allen's departure. From what he had incautiously said, she was led to hold Miss Chevening chiefly responsible, a conclusion which did not tend to lessen the already vigorous hate she felt for her young mistress.

It might be thought that, seeing that Susan's charms had proved powerless with Allen, his absence could not reasonably be held any personal injury to her; but hate is no logician—she chose to consider that he would have succumbed to her sooner or later had not Miss Margot wantonly bewitched him. That Margot cared one straw for him, she knew was impossible, but, to Susan's vulgarly spiteful mind, it seemed probable enough that she had chosen to amuse herself at his expense sooner than go without admiration.

And a fact that had come to her knowledge lately had confirmed her in these views. Young Barchard, who had a keen eye for a pretty face, had thrown himself in her way of late, and Susan, very well able to take care of herself, had not repulsed him, though she was quite aware of the character he bore, and put him in a different category altogether from her respectable village admirers. But, as a former companion of Allen's and as a young man with more smartness and style than most Gorsecombe swains affected, he was not without his recommendations, and nothing was more natural than that their conversation should sometimes fall upon young Mr. Chadwick, and that Barchard should mention that curious incident of a letter in a female hand with a Bournemouth postmark which was to be secretly delivered.

'And you didn't think to open it to see what was inside?' said the ingenuous Susan.

'Twasn't any business of mine,' he replied, 'and besides, there was a seal on it.'

'Ah,' said Susan, '*I'd* have managed it, seal or no seal, if it had been me.'

'Trust you!' he said with a grin of admiration.

But Susan thought a good deal about this mysterious letter: was it that which had decided master to send Mr. Allen away?

Had Margot written it? There must have been something underhand about it, or it would not have been addressed under cover instead of openly to the house. And to think that she could find out nothing!

It is said that servants know everything of their employers' affairs, and, owing to the carelessness with which in most households allusions are made in their presence, they do know a great deal. Few credit their domestics with any ears or intelligence, but, for all that, many a Hercules—more or less distorted, but recognisable—is constructed in the kitchen from a fragmentary foot picked up in the dining-room. Here, however, the utmost caution had been observed; no one below stairs, not even the infallible Masterman, knew more than the bare facts that Mr. Allen had been sent out to foreign parts at very short notice, and that he did not seem to fancy going.

Susan had tried to extract information from Lettice; but, child as she was, Lettice had an instinctive feeling that she ought not to chatter of family troubles to an inquisitive maid. 'I don't think mother would like me to talk about it, Susan,' she had said, with the little air of dignity she could take at times; 'and besides, you know, I don't know myself why poor Allen went. Only I'm sure it wasn't for anything wrong he had done.'

One evening Susan, who occasionally acted as Margot's maid, was brushing Miss Chevening's hair, when it occurred to her to try the effect of a few judicious remarks. She was always demure and attentive with Margot, who had no suspicion of the venomous resentment that smouldered under that trimly-aproned bosom. We all walk at times, undismayed because unwitting, under the masked guns of some bitter secret hatred. Margot had entirely forgotten the girl's imaginary Trouville grievance, but if she had thought that the other remembered, she would have been more amused than alarmed—what harm could Susan do to her?

'It seems quite like a different house without Mr. Allen, don't it, miss?' began Susan.

Miss Chevening raised her eyebrows. 'Does it?' she said; 'I don't quite see how his being away can affect you, Susan.'

Susan felt a vicious longing to tug the beautiful bronze tresses she was handling.

'You don't, don't you, you stuck up 'aughty thing!' she thought; 'but perhaps it affects me as well as my betters.'

'In course I was not eluding to myself, miss,' she said, 'being only a domestic; I was thinking of the difference it would make to you.'

'Don't trouble to think, then,' said Miss Chevening, 'because really it is no concern of yours.'

'Even servants has their feelings, miss,' retorted Susan; 'little as you seem to give them credit for it. I'd no intention of taking any liberty in what I said, I'm sure.'

'Don't be a goose,' said Margot; 'I am not offended, only—well, I don't care to discuss Mr. Allen with anybody.'

'Very good, miss,' said Susan, with inward rage. 'We'll see if I can't touch you yet, my lady!' her thoughts ran.

'That young man, Barchard, *he'll* miss Mr. Allen, miss,' she continued.

'Still Mr. Allen?' said Margot, a little impatiently. 'Will he indeed, Susan?'

'Well, miss, judging by the friends they were. That young Barchard, they do say, was a sort of "fat-totalum," as they call it, to Mr. Allen. I thought you was aware of that, miss. Why, if anyone was sending him a letter they didn't want noticed—and you know, miss, young gentlemen—well, they do get letters of that sort sometimes—they'd send it——'

Susan had succeeded in disturbing her mistress's equanimity at last; two angry roses burnt in Margot's cheeks as she interrupted her—

'That will do, Susan; I've no wish to hear gossip of that sort. And you can go now. I will finish brushing my hair myself.'

Susan retired, not without satisfaction. If she could only be sure that there was something about that letter which was not known, which Miss Margot wished concealed—if she could only find it out! Unhappily, she was as far from settling that important point as ever, and in the meantime she was powerless.

Some days after this they were at breakfast one snowy January morning, when Chadwick, who was opening his letters, gave an angry exclamation. Margot looked up, and was astonished at the black fury which contorted his face.

'Have you had bad news?' inquired her mother with a languid interest.

'Bad news!' he said with a scowl. 'I don't know if you would call it bad news—there, read it yourself!'

He flung a letter across the table written in a slovenly, half-commercial hand. 'Why, it's from Allen!' exclaimed Mrs. Chadwick, glancing at the signature, 'and dated from Madras. I thought it was Bombay he was going to?'

'Don't talk about it,' he stormed; 'read it. The infernal, ungrateful, young villain, the double-faced blackguard, to trick me like this!'

Mrs. Chadwick read it and handed it on to Margot. It was a piteous confused epistle; he implored his father not to be angry with him, because he could not, after all, go out to the plantation; he would have done it, he declared, but for what his father had said about having told the agent everything; he could not bear living with a man who had been told he was a thief and wanted looking after. He was going to seek his fortune in another place, in another way, where no one would know anything against him. He hoped before long to come back—rich.

'How can he seek his fortune?' cried Mrs. Chadwick. 'He must be mad—he has no money.'

'Like the fool I was,' said Chadwick, 'I gave him some. I thought I could trust him that little way on board ship. And he's made off with it!'

Margot looked up from the letter. 'Did you really tell him that you had told your agent?' she asked. 'Was that true?'

'It's true enough,' said Chadwick. 'How was I to send him out there without giving Macdonald a hint? It was only fair to him.'

'But you need not have let Allen know!' she cried.

'I meant to show him he had better be on his best behaviour,' he said surlily; 'but that's only an excuse—he meant to give me the slip all the time. I see that now.'

'Joshua,' said his wife, 'the next thing will be that he will come back here!'

'Will he?' thundered Chadwick, '*will* he? Let him come—and see how he is received! I swear, if he dares to shows his hang-dog face here, I'll turn him out. I've borne with him for the last time. He's no son of mine. I disown him—he may go to the dogs, and die with them for all I care. You hear me, Selina? Never mention his name to me again—nor you,' he added to Margot; 'tell that child to hold her tongue, and the boy too. I'll have no chattering about it, make them understand that or it will be the worse for all of them!'

He rose from his untasted breakfast and closed the door violently after him, leaving Margot and her mother looking at one another in silent terror.

'This is very dreadful, darling,' said Mrs. Chadwick at last.

'Very,' said Margot. 'Do you think—will he do what he says?'

'Your step-father? Undoubtedly. He is very angry, and no wonder. He makes me quite afraid when he is like that. But—I suppose it is wicked to be glad—but I can't help it. We shall never be troubled with that wretched boy again now. If he came back he would not be received.'

Margot gave a little shudder. 'Mother,' she said, 'don't talk like that just yet—it is too horrible! When I think that if it had not been——' She broke off: she could not finish the thought in words.

'My dear,' said Mrs. Chadwick, 'I can understand your feeling a little distressed. But no one can tell—I can never describe to you—the horror I had of that boy. I can't pretend to be anything but very thankful that he has relieved us of himself like this, though of course, I can be sorry for him too.'

And Margot, though she hated herself for it, was conscious, too, beneath her remorse and pity for the misguided, neglected Allen, of that same odious thankfulness and relief that, come what might, she would never now live in the same house with him, that she was safe from him for the future.

Only Lettice bewailed the news in secret with a sorrow un-

alloyed by any selfish considerations. He had been so kind to her in those last few days—that rough brother who was always in disgrace; he had looked so sad at having to go—and now he had been really wicked, and she would never see him any more. She sobbed herself to sleep that night, thinking of him out in the darkness all alone, with no one allowed to love him or speak to him ever again.

But no other tears were shed for Allen.

BOOK V.

JUDGMENT *v.* INCLINATION.

CHAPTER I.

IN DOUBT.

THE history of the Chadwick household during the fourteen months that followed Allen's final fiasco may be told in very few pages. Of what had become of him they heard, and perhaps preferred to hear, nothing; in the house his name was never mentioned; it was understood that Chadwick had altered his will. He was reticent on the subject of his son, but, nevertheless, it was generally known in Gorsecombe that the young man had gone completely to the bad, which surprised few, though the more charitable thought that his step-mother might have done more to prevent it, had her interest lain in that direction.

Disappointed in his own son, Chadwick set himself to find what consolation he might in his step-children. He was gratified by all the admiration they excited; it flattered him most of all when strangers assumed that they were actually his children. He prided himself on the indulgence with which he treated them. Margot had a horse of her own now, and Lettice a pony; he liked to be seen riding about the country with them; he liked them to have every advantage that his wealth could give. Vanity, and the mortification Allen had caused him, had more to do with this than any real affection for the Chevenings. He was never quite at his ease with them—never without a secret consciousness of a subtle difference between himself and them that met him at every turn. Even Lettice submitted a little unwillingly to his rough caresses, and did not chatter so freely to him as to others. Margot's behaviour to him gave him nothing to find fault with; she had found herself unable to refuse the favours he showered upon her, and would not be guilty of the meanness of accepting everything without making all the return in her power. But though she was dutiful, and even grateful, she could not bring herself to pretend an affection she did not feel; it was all she could do sometimes to conceal the shudder caused by some fresh revelation of the man's essential coarseness of fibre.

Ida stood lowest in his favour. She had come back from the

South of France with no trace of the crisis she had passed through ; in fact, she seemed to have erased the very memory of it from her mind. But she was still delicate, with a sensitiveness that he characterised as 'finical.' She allowed him to see that she shrank from him, which irritated him. It was lucky for Ida that her elder sister was always at hand to avert an outburst, and bring Chadwick back into good-humour.

As for Chadwick's relations with his wife, they had not become closer with time, though there was nothing in their behaviour to one another to show that either regretted the union. The world—the local world of Gorsecombe, that is—called Mrs. Chadwick an admirable wife, and considered that she had accomplished marvels in improving her husband's position.

There had been no pretence of love between them ; he had admired her, and did so still ; he had wanted a handsome, well-bred woman of the world to preside over his house and attract local society ; he had all he had bargained for, and more, for he had not expected to triumph so instantly and completely over the prejudice that had surrounded him as this marriage had enabled him to do. But for all that, he was not content ; he found himself too much eclipsed by his wife ; he knew too well that people came to his house and invited him to theirs for her sake ; that he personally was little, if at all, more popular than before.

He had not, as he had hoped, been put on the Commission of the Peace ; he was not asked to join shooting parties in the autumn ; he was not made to feel that he was an important or a welcome presence anywhere. People were civil to him, and that was about all—and he cursed their civility in his soul.

Though he would not allow it to himself, he had realised none of his expectations ; he was more lonely here in this big house, with all those fair young faces about him ; he was less of a power, in spite of all his money, than he had been out on his Behar plantations. Sometimes it came home to him bitterly enough, that graceless, good-for-nothing son of his had, after all, been the only person who had really looked up to him or cared for him. But Allen had sinned past all forgiveness ; having chosen to cut himself off from the only means of retrieving his disgrace, he was less than a stranger henceforth, and it was useless to think of what might have been.

To forget all gloomy reflections of this sort, Chadwick had recourse to a means that he was already too much inclined to seek—he drank. No one—not even his wife—suspected the extent to which the habit had grown upon him ; he only indulged it when alone, and the only effect wine had hitherto had upon him was to render him more taciturn.

His wife and family saw less of him in the evenings ; he allowed them to do very much as they pleased, even if he snarled occasionally under Mrs. Chadwick's rather frequent and increasing demands on his purse.

As the second spring after Allen's departure approached, she had begun cautiously to sound him as to the desirability of a house in town for the season. Many of the best people in their Pineshire set were going to spend the summer in London; Ida was eighteen now, and Margot had never been presented; it was so tiresome to have to live in Gorsecombe all the year round, so necessary for the girls to see more of society, and so on. Chadwick had resisted at first, until he found that his own presence in town would not be indispensable, when he began to see that the plan might have its advantages. He would be relieved from the oppression of his wife's society, free to live his life as he chose, without having to study appearances and act as host to people who had no interests in common with him.

So Chadwick had ended by giving his consent, and a house had been found on the Bayswater side of Hyde Park, with which his wife (although she would have preferred something in Mayfair) declared herself tolerably well satisfied. A stronger motive than the mere desire to get back into the movement after so many years of enforced abstention had prompted Mrs. Chadwick. Young Guy Hotham had left Oxford, and was to read for the Bar in town, where he would share Nugent Orme's chambers. She had reason to suspect that the young man was beginning to have a decidedly soft place in his heart for Ida. What a triumph if Ida could succeed in carrying off such a prize in her first season! She had grown very pretty of late, and young Hotham, at all events, seemed to find her more attractive than her elder and lovelier sister, of whom he stood a little in awe. And Ida in her limp way was ready enough to return his liking. Lady Adela might not approve of such a match, but she would not be in town, and even she could hardly find a serious objection. Of course it would have been better had Margot been the chosen one, but Margot was provokingly blind to her own interests and refused all guidance in these matters. She had already refused young Hopwood Maltby, the eldest son of the wealthy brewer, a quite unexceptionable *parti*, who had every chance of being a peer some day, and her only reason had been the ridiculous pretext that she did not like him well enough to marry him.

Mrs. Chadwick knew well that it was hopeless to attempt to constrain her eldest daughter's affections; she was heart-whole, to the best of her mother's knowledge; the intimacy with the Vicarage, which had seemed dangerous at one time, had died away; the only thing to be done was to trust to Margot's face bringing her some piece of good fortune that even she would have no heart to throw away.

If she had known more of her daughter's heart she would have felt less sanguine. Seldom as Margot had seen Orme during the past year, she was farther than ever from forgetting him: the circumstance she felt most keenly in Millicent's withdrawal was that she heard so much less of him. She thought, she was almost certain, that he had cared for her a little at one time—his manner

when they met had changed since then—had he found some greater attraction in London? She knew nothing, and was afraid to attract Millicent's suspicion by any questions as to her brother's doings. It did not occur to her that she herself was chiefly responsible for Nugent's change of manner. The dread she had felt had worn off; she had come to think, or persuade herself that he would think, Allen's desertion a sufficient justification of her conduct towards him; if he was inclined to blame her, she believed it would be possible to bring him to adopt her views. She hoped he had forgotten Allen altogether, for he had made no allusion to him of late; yet at times she feared that this silence was a sign that he knew and condemned. But Millicent had promised not to repeat that unlucky confidence—it could not be that. In London she would meet him more often, and be better able to judge.

It was strange, even to herself, that her thoughts should be so frequently busy with speculation on this meeting, and that the retention of his good opinion had come to possess such a growing importance for her.

Some instinct warned her that, for her own sake, she should not think of him as more than a friend, and that it was safest to see as little of him as possible, but that did not alter the sharp dread that overcame her at the mere idea of finding that his very friendship was no longer hers. It would be terrible if he had come to dislike or despise her—worse if he were merely indifferent—and she must wait for certainty until they met each other face to face.

Spring found Mrs. Chadwick and her daughters established in their new quarters, which not everyone would have considered a good exchange for a country house full of light and air and fragrant garden-breaths. This London mansion was tall and narrow, dark as to its staircase and back rooms, which looked out upon a deep stucco well or shaft. But then it possessed what the estate agent's bills termed 'spacious reception-rooms,' furnished, it is true, with the chilly and unhomelike meagreness—something between the appointments of superior lodgings and an inferior hotel—of a house that has never been a home. However, it faced the great main road and the Park railings and wide stretches of green turf beyond. To Mrs. Chadwick, and perhaps to her two eldest daughters, there was something inspiring and exhilarating in the very din of the traffic that rolled and clattered all day past their windows. Only Lettice, at lessons with her new governess in a dark little room at the rear, seemed losing her colour and spirits.

The almond blossom had begun to brighten the grimy squares, and the murderous east wind had not had time as yet to mow down the crocuses, drawn up in lines like young conscripts, along the garden walks. It was late in the afternoon and the Chevening girls were in the big drawing-room with their mother, having just returned from a drive in the Park; Lettice was reading diligently in the window.

'And what have you been doing with yourself this afternoon, pet?' asked her mother.

'Oh, Mademoiselle and I had a walk,' said Lettice, in a tone that implied some contempt for this exercise as practised in London. 'We went along the Serpentine, and there was a boy sailing his boat there—at least it would only sail bottom upwards. And I lent him Mademoiselle's umbrella to reach it with. I don't think Serpentine boys are very polite, for he didn't even say "Thank you." Mummy, I do wish we could have brought Yarrow with us!'

'Poor Yarrow hasn't been well lately, dear, and London isn't good for him.'

'Do you know,' said Lettice, 'I think Yarrow and I must have the same kind of constitution. London isn't good for *me*, either. Even Chiswick was more country than this?'

Mrs. Chadwick was stroking Lettice's hair. 'I must take you to have some of this cut off,' she remarked.

'Must you?' said Lettice. 'Don't, mother. I like it long—it's company for me when I'm reading.'

'Never mind about the tea just now, Margot,' said Mrs. Chadwick as Margot was preparing to attend to her usual duty; 'Ida must pour me out some for once. I want you to look at that list on the writing-table, and see if I have left anybody out who ought to be there.'

Margot took up the list. She and Ida were to be presented next week, and Mrs. Chadwick was asking all the people she knew in town to look in after the ceremony. Margot's eyes ran rapidly down the names of those who were to be written to—the one name she wished to find there was absent. Could she trust herself to suggest its inclusion without betraying the interest she felt? She sat there undecided, playing with the paper as her eyes looked idly out over the Park and the trees, whose bare branches were already showing knotted outlines against the pale rose and amethyst sky.

'Well, Margot,' said her mother, 'is everybody there?'

'I think so, unless—haven't you forgotten Mr. Orme?'

'It didn't occur to me to invite Mr. Orme—he has his profession to attend to, and afternoon parties are not likely to have any attractions for him.'

Margot felt unable to press the point; probably he would not come even if he were asked. Fate was against her for the present.

Ida came up at this moment, put down the cup she had brought Margot, and looked over her shoulder. 'Hasn't Mr. Gny Hotham his profession to attend to, too, mother?' she inquired a little maliciously. 'You have asked him.'

'Mr. Hotham has not to depend upon it.'

'I think,' said Ida, 'that if you ask one, you ought to ask the other—they are living in the same house together, and won't it look a little pointed not to ask both?'

Ida did not often show so much interest in what was going on, and she was actuated now, not by any intuition of her sister's

wishes, but by a suspicion that Guy Hotham would be more likely to present himself if he could be certain of not being the only male creature in the room.

Mrs. Chadwick, who always yielded to any suggestion of Ida's, did not think it worth while to oppose this one. 'Very well, my dear,' she said indolently; 'if you like to ask him, do so. I should be sorry to offend the dear Vicar.'

On the following afternoon, Orme was in his professional chambers in New Square, engaged in reading over a case that had just been brought in for his opinion, when the staircase outside resounded with a brisk but not very professional footstep, which was easy to recognise as Guy Hotham's. To assist that young gentleman in his studies for the Bar examination, he had given him what is known as the run of his chambers, though Guy usually preferred to run in any other direction.

Orme looked up smiling as the other burst in, for the two, in spite of the four years between them (often as great a barrier as a decade or so to a young fellow of Hotham's age) were on excellent terms.

'Hope you haven't hurried over your breakfast?' he said politely, with a glance at a little clock on his table which marked a quarter to five.

'Oh, I looked in for a few minutes at the Club on my way down. I haven't come to do any reading to-day.'

'You don't mean it!'

'You shut up. I've lots of time to mug up Snell and Williams between this and Christmas—it's not as if I meant to take up the thing seriously.'

'Well,' Orme admitted, 'it isn't much.'

'I only want to get called. The governor thinks I ought to know a little law, in case I get made a magistrate some day. I say,' he broke off, beginning to turn over the bundles of papers on Orme's table, 'you *are* going it, old man. "Case for opinion of Counsel," "Mr. Nugent Orme—two guas!" "Mr. Nugent Orme, to settle draft statement of claim and advise generally." "Draft minutes." "Draft Decree." "Brief—with you, Mr. Hallerby, Q.C." All these in since I was here last. You lucky old beggar! Why, I know no end of fellows who've never had a brief. I'm not interrupting you, am I?'

'Not a bit,' said Orme, heartily. 'I was just going to knock off.' It struck him that his young friend had some purpose in his visit, which he didn't quite know how to touch upon; there was something decidedly uneasy in his way of wandering about. 'Nothing wrong, is there?' he asked. 'Anything you want to speak to me about?'

'Nothing, old boy; don't alarm yourself. By Jove, you've just reminded me,' said young Hotham, with an air of sudden recollection that was too artless to be quite genuine. 'I'd forgotten what it was I *did* come for—it was this'—here he produced a

letter. 'It came just after you had gone,' he exclaimed, with a reddening complexion, 'so I—er—thought it might be important—and I'd bring it up.'

Nugent took it, and the younger man stood watching his face while he read. Apparently Guy was not consoled by what he saw.

'Thanks,' said Nugent, as he put the note in his pocket with a quiet satisfaction.

'It doesn't happen by any chance to be an invitation for Thursday afternoon, after the Drawing-room, does it?' said Hotham, unable to repress his curiosity.

'It does—why?'

'Nothing—only I thought you seemed rather pleased at it. I shouldn't have fancied afternoon parties were much in your line. Shall you go?'

'If I can manage it, very probably,' said Orme, who had every intention of going.

'She's asked me, too.'

'Miss Chevening has? Well, are *you* going?'

'Don't know—I may. I say, Orme, if anyone else had asked you, would you have gone?'

'You're confoundedly curious to-day, my dear fellow.'

'I know I am. I can't help it. Look here, Orme, I wish you would tell me something. I'd no idea of this till to-day. I thought she was beginning to—I didn't think she'd write to any other fellow!'

Orme raised his eyebrows. 'To ask him to come to an At Home—why the deuce shouldn't she?'

'It wasn't that—it was the way you looked when you read it. Orme, it—it's not a "case" with you, is it—you know what I mean?'

'I won't pretend I don't. If I said yes, what would it matter to you?'

'A lot,' said Hotham. 'I tell you what, I'm awfully gone on her, and where shall I be if you go in and cut me out?'

'I've not cut you out yet, and I'm not likely to,' said Orme, rather sadly. 'Most people would back your chances.'

'Oh, I shall have the old place some day, when the old governor drops, and—the title and all that. But what does a girl care for that!'

Privately Orme was of opinion that a girl cared a good deal, but he said nothing, and Hotham went on lugubriously. 'Anyway, I've nothing at present, while you—you're a clever chap, and no end of a swell at most things; you very nearly got your "blue" when you were up, and I never got out of the "torpids," and you'll be making your fortune at the Bar before very long, and—it's devilish hard after knowing her six months to find myself out of the running!'

'Doesn't it strike you as rather absurd for us two to be contending with one another in modesty like this on the strength of a note

asking us to come to tea? Six months! I've known her for nearly three years, if you come to that.'

'But she couldn't have been more than sixteen then,' exclaimed Hotham.

'I should say she was about nineteen—not that it signifies.'

'Not signify!' cried Hotham. 'It strikes me it does. You've been speaking of the elder sister, Margot, all this time, haven't you?'

'Well?'

'Well, it's the younger one, *Ida*, I meant—but wasn't that letter from her, then?'

'Of course not!'

'I didn't know—I fancied—what funk'd me was your face when you read it, and all the time—by Jove, what an ass I've been!'

'What asses we've both been,' remarked Orme, a little annoyed that he had allowed his secret to escape him. 'You've got this out of me, Hotham, but for Heaven's sake don't imagine that this is anything but a one-sided business—this note is an ordinary invitation. I'm nothing to her; it's as likely as not we don't meet a second time this season. I doubt if her mother will give me many opportunities of seeing her.'

'You shall have your opportunities, though, all the same,' said Hotham. 'You've heard me speak of my aunt, Mrs. Antrobus? Tremendous trump; has a flat in Albert Hall Mansions. She'll do anything for me. Well, I told her all about *Ida*, you know, and got her to call on Mrs. Chadwick. And she took to *Ida* directly she saw her, and means to ask her to all her parties. She's always having a party of some kind—prefers 'em young and pretty. Well, of course, she can't ask one sister without the other, and, don't you see? I'll take care you get a card for anything that's going. My aunt knows who you are; you've only to come with me and call some afternoon, and get the right side of the old lady, and it's your own fault if you don't get an innings sooner or later!'

'It's awfully good of you!' said Orme, who no longer regretted his indiscretion.

'Oh, now I know you're not my hated rival, I feel like a brother to you! We may be brothers some day, old fellow, if everything goes on right.'

Orme was afraid to reckon too confidently on the future; still, he felt that it looked brighter now than he had ever dared to hope. He would see Margot again very shortly, if Guy Hotham kept his word; it would not be his only chance of seeing her. And he had made up his mind that if he could see any sign that she was not wholly indifferent to him, he would speak to her of his hopes before the summer was over. There was no reason why he should hold back any longer; his practice had increased considerably within the last year; he was already making a fair income for a man of his standing, and might look forward to marrying within the next year or two.

And yet, intensely as he longed for her, determined as he was to win her for his own, he was conscious all the time how little he really knew of her. He told himself that certain characteristics which had given him a dumb pain to witness long ago, signs of what, in anyone else, he would have called heartlessness, had faded or been outlived. Had he not seen her conquering her prejudices, had she not shown herself in that softened, sweetly repentant mood? But it was not that which had made him love her first—his love was unreasoning, instinctive—he could not master it, but at the same time he had always a haunting perception that it might perhaps be better for him if he could.

CHAPTER II.

A PARTIAL SOLUTION.

Perhaps the smile and tender tone
Came out of her pitying womanhood.—*Maud.*

It might be thought that the addition of a single unit to the population of a mighty city would make no very perceptible difference to the appearance of its streets. Lovers know better. To Orme, London had seemed transformed ever since he had known of Miss Chevening's arrival. Born in the country and accustomed all his life to open air and exercise, the great city, with its dingy bricks and its second-hand atmosphere, generally oppressed his spirits and told on his health as it does with all but natives. But now a glamour had fallen upon the bustling streets, the Park and Gardens were full of delightful possibilities. Nothing was commonplace, no one uninteresting to him; his daily walk back from chambers was a romantic adventure; such social invitations as came in his way were accepted with a novel sense of excitement. For might not her face at any moment flash across him from the throng? Might not any carriage he saw approaching contain her? Was it not possible that he might find her amongst the company the very next evening he went out?

It seemed for some time that if he met her at all it would be in some such accidental way. He called, but they were not at home, and all his hopes of encountering her in public or private had so far been disappointed. The possibility was always there, however, and he kept up heart on that. Since the day on which Hotham had brought him her letter, his worst anxiety was removed; he would certainly see her once, and have the opportunity of speaking to her on this Thursday which was slowly approaching; he could wait more patiently in the meanwhile.

When the day came at last, he was engaged all day in court, as junior counsel in a complicated patent case. The duty of feeding a

querulous leader with the appropriate diagrams, specifications, affidavits, and photographs at the right moment kept him effectually from thinking of more sentimental subjects, as the learned Q.C. addressed an interminable argument to the judge in his peevish, high-pitched voice, while the air of the court grew stuffier and heavier as the afternoon advanced. But when four o'clock came, and the Court rose, what a deliverance it was to Orme to get out into the dim corridors, and how fervently he hoped, as he crossed from the robing-room to his chambers, that he would find no work requiring immediate consideration!

To his relief there was nothing that could not stand over till next day, and he made his escape at once; it was too early to go to Hyde Park, but there was the inseparable black bag to be left at his rooms, Hotham to be picked up, if he had not already gone, and then there were some slight changes in his toilet to be made before he could feel himself worthy to meet his lady's eyes. It must be a very strong-minded or self-confident lover who does not on such occasions regard his ordinary raiment with a distrustful and disparaging eye.

At last he and Hotham were on their way to the house opposite Hyde Park; the afternoon was raw and bleak, with a sullen leaden sky, and a vicious east wind that drove the fine dust in stinging showers and gave a pinched, blighted look to the faces in the street. But within the house, which was full of people, the feminine element being, of course, in a very decided majority, it was warm and cheerful enough. The drawing-room party had not yet returned, so that Lettice enjoyed the unaccustomed dignity of acting as deputy hostess upstairs. Nugent remained below in the tea-room where Hotham had introduced him to Mrs. Antrobus, a middle-aged lady of much vivacity. 'I've heard so much of you from my nephew,' she told him; 'such a good thing for him to be with someone a little older than himself! And I suppose you are really working at your profession? I've always said that poor dear Guy ought to have gone into the army, but his mother wouldn't hear of it, and of course he'll never be anything but a barrister in name, if he's that. I should be so thankful to see him settle down to something or someone, poor fellow! London's so full of temptations for a young man, Mr. Orme. Don't you think so?'

Orme said he thought she had no reason to be anxious on Hotham's account.

'You mustn't let him get into mischief if you can help it. He's behaving himself very well just now, I must say—if I could only believe he was in earnest. When are these girls coming back, I wonder? They'll be perished with the cold—such insanity to venture out on such a day as this! They're very late—more presentations than usual to-day, I suppose; I can't run away till I've seen how they look in their finery. Ah, here they are at last!'

Across the shaded lights and through the still unshrouded window Orme saw the carriage dash up in the waning light, with the

coachman and footman wearing those bouquets which custom—Heaven knows why—provides for their solace and refreshment on this particular occasion.

She was coming—he would see her now—and yet, by one of those strange contradictions in the human mind, he felt none of the ecstasy he had expected—nothing but a suspense that was absolute pain.

As the two sisters entered, they were instantly rushed at by admiring girl-friends, pitying, exclaiming, questioning, and comparing experiences, while Nugent had nothing to do but to stand apart and watch Margot as she stood there, holding her long train and laughing and talking gaily.

She was looking radiant; her complexion had not suffered either from the cruel winds or the fatigue of the day; her loveliness was heightened rather than overborne by the elaborate costume; the small ostrich feather gave a statelier air to her graceful head; he felt an almost personal pride in the sight of her, and yet his heart ached too. Could he reasonably expect this rare and exquisite being to link her existence with his?—who was he that she should prefer him above all others?—would it not be wiser to relinquish this dream once for all?

It might be, but he fully intended to persevere for all that; no pitiful self-distrust should hold him back from trying for the prize he had set his heart on; he knew that he had the power to make a position for her in time; he would take no dismissal but hers.

And just then she saw him, and her sweet eyes shone with the old frank pleasure. She was still his friend.

The room was thinning now, and he was able to come forward and speak to her.

‘So you have actually come,’ she said. ‘I fancied you would probably despise such vanities.’

‘I didn’t know I was such a Diogenes as all that,’ he answered.

‘Oh, but it does seem an absurd practice, when you come to think of it, this solemn inviting of all one’s friends to come and gaze on people for no better reason than that they have just been presented to their Sovereign. Confess that is what you have been thinking.’

‘My conscience is quite clear.’

‘You say that quite nicely; but it doesn’t make me feel less barbaric all the same. And now do you think you can get me a cup of coffee and something to eat. I can’t possibly hold out any longer.’

So presently they were standing side by side before the usual long table, and he was delightfully occupied in ministering to her requirements. As they stood there, his eyes fell on one of the two neat maids in attendance, and he speculated idly in passing why it was that her face seemed familiar to him, though he not unnaturally failed to identify Susan with the termagant nursemaid at Trouville, who had been the means of first directing his attention to Miss

Chevening. Susan knew him, however, though she stood there, demure and prim, as if her whole attention was concentrated on her duties.

Margot was describing her day's experiences. 'And the blocks were so tiresome,' she said; 'and the ugly common faces that came up and flattened themselves against the glass, gasping like the fish in an aquarium, only, unfortunately for us, they were not dumb. Some of the rougher people seemed quite injured at our having the insolence to go to Court, I felt so inclined to tell them that I wished they were going instead of me, and that they would be more contented if they knew how fearfully uncomfortable we were inside!'

'I suppose it was all right when you were once at the palace?'

'Not at all. It was so cold in those corridors and antechambers, and the frightful responsibility of one's train—never wear a train, Mr. Orme,' she counselled him gravely in parenthesis. 'As for the ceremony, I am very vague about it already. I remember our names being called out, and that I kissed the Queen's hand, and got through all my curtsying somehow without a mishap. I'd practised, you see. One girl that came after us was not so lucky, at least she came out in tears. I don't know what had happened to her, poor thing! I think she suddenly lost her head and bolted at the critical moment, and the Queen had her fetched back to do it properly. How wretched she must be feeling now, mustn't she? I should have been very disappointed if her Majesty had not stayed until our turn came; there is nothing Republican about me. You are not a Radical, I hope?'

'It would evidently be rash to admit it just now if I were,' he said, 'but I should be very sorry to see our Royalty represented by King Demos.'

'Should you? I am so glad,' she said; 'so should I. Fancy having to go to kiss *his* hand!' She made her pretty grimace at the idea. 'I should run away then. But tell me what you have been doing since I saw you last; have you been working very hard, and addressing British juries—isn't that what you do?'

'Juries are not in my department,' he explained; 'but the other day I had to face three Lords Justices of Appeal, which was a fearful ordeal.'

'Really; why I met one of them out at dinner last week, and he was delightful—so amusing and pleasant!'

'They are not quite like that on the bench,' he said. 'I assure you I passed a most uncomfortable morning. I made sure they were all against me; they put such tremendous posers, one after another.'

'Three against one doesn't sound very fair,' she said; 'and so, I suppose, you lost your—what do you call it—verdict? No, case.'

'Oh, I won my appeal,' he answered (he might have mentioned, had he chosen, that he had even been complimented from the bench on the ability he had shown), 'but won't you tell me about your own doings now?'

'There is so little to tell. Life in Gorsecombe is not exactly fertile in incident, as you know. The chief thing is sad, and that has happened since I have been away. Did you ever see Yarrow, my collie?—he is ill, and I am very much afraid I shall never see him again.'

He could almost have wished himself her dog, to be spoken of in that tone of loving regret, to call that sudden shadow to her bright eyes. 'I haven't dared to tell Lettice yet,' she added; 'she will be heartbroken, she has always been his favourite. I shall never forget how wretched he was one day when she was quite small and he tripped her up by accident in playing with her, and hurt her knee. Nothing would content him but being allowed to come into her room, and he remained there with his head on the counterpane, trying to make her understand how grieved he was. I can't bear to think he may have to be killed.'

How he loved her for the feeling she showed—how doubly dear she seemed for this touch of tenderness and sympathy—and yet with her usual perversity she contrived to destroy the effect almost immediately.

There was a slight pause after she had spoken last, and then Orme asked a question which caused her to become frigid and indifferent as if by some blighting spell.

'By the way,' he inquired, 'have you heard from your step-brother Allen lately?'

Somehow his former pupil had rather fallen out of his recollection of late, as persons do who take no means of recalling themselves to our minds; in his visits to Gorsecombe he had not chanced to hear the result of the indigo-planting scheme, and he asked about Allen now with a sense of shame at his own forgetfulness.

'From Allen?' she said carelessly—too carelessly almost. 'Oh, no, he does not write to me, you know.'

'But his father has had news of him, I suppose?' said Orme. 'I hope he is doing well out in India?'

'Oh, I believe so. I—I really do not know exactly. Shall we go upstairs now?'

He saw that she did not mean to pursue the subject; indeed, the mention of that name had raised a sudden constraint between them; she led the way to the drawing-room and he followed, but no more was said on either side.

Once more he had to be content with looking on, for Miss Chevening was instantly surrounded as before. Lady Yaverland, who had presented her nieces, was upstairs with the Miss Bradings, whose first Drawing-room dated from a season further back than they cared to remember, and poor Lord Yaverland, conscious of not appearing to advantage in white knee-breeches and stockings (he had once filled a minor post in a short-lived Administration), kept himself and his fringed cocked-hat as much in the background as possible and looked acutely miserable.

Guy Hotham was hovering about Ida, and though there were

several people in the room Orme knew, he did not feel inclined to make any further conversational openings just then.

But presently Lettice came up and shook hands with him. 'I wonder how the Queen holds her Drawing-room?' she remarked. 'Should you think she walked about and talked to all the people just as mother is doing now? I should like to talk to the Queen—wouldn't you?'

Nugent feared he might have a difficulty in finding something to talk to her about.

'I shouldn't,' said Lettice; 'there's quite a lot of things I should like to ask her.'

'I believe it isn't considered proper to ask Royalty questions.'

'Oh, but I should ask only polite ones—and I should tell her she needn't answer unless she liked. That wasn't what I came to talk to you about, though; there's something I want to know so dreadfully, but I can't ask you here. Would you mind coming down into the conservatory, where no one will hear us?'

Orme followed her obediently outside and down a few steps to a small tiled alcove hung with Persian tapestries.

'You were Allen's tutor once, weren't you?' began Lettice, 'long ago—before *we* knew him.'

'Yes,' said Nugent; 'for a short time I was.'

'He liked you,' she said; 'he often told me so. And what I want you to tell me is, if he has ever written to you to say what has become of him, and how he is. I do want to know so very much!'

'He has not written to me, Lettice,' said Orme; 'but won't your sister tell you all you want to know—or Mr. Chadwick?'

'Margot never likes talking about him,' said Lettice, 'not even here. And I daren't ask papa. I should be sent to school if I mentioned Allen's name even; he said so. It's so dreadful, though, to think of poor Allen wandering about with no one to care about him, and no home to come back to!'

Orme started. 'What do you mean, Lettice?—wandering about—and no home to come back to? I thought Allen was settled in India, and doing well!'

'Oh, no,' she said sadly, 'we don't know where he is. I don't believe anybody at home cares, except me. And you haven't heard—you can't tell me about him?'

'I wish I could,' he said, with a painful sense of bewilderment; 'but—but all this is new to me. I have been taking it for granted that he was all right.'

'I'm sorry,' said Lettice, with a little sigh. 'I suppose we had better go back again now—you don't mind my bringing you down here all for nothing, do you?'

Orme returned to the drawing-room, where the people were beginning to make a move. Mrs. Antrobus stopped in passing to give him the invitation to come and see her, which would have meant so much to him a short time ago. Just then it seemed a mockery;

for it was, perhaps, pardonable in him, that Lettice's revelation should affect him most powerfully in connection with Margot. He had believed her to be frankness itself, he had hoped that she put some confidence in him, and yet she knew that Allen was an out-cast and a wanderer upon the face of the earth, and she had suppressed this knowledge, and answered smoothly, carelessly, as if—though it concerned her not—all were well with him!

And, such is the egotism of a lover, it was the attempt at concealment, the withdrawal of confidence in relation to himself, that struck him most painfully, coming near to disenchanting him for the moment. The deception seemed so wanton, so cynically reckless, that he was staggered.

He felt unable to stay there; the sight of her, all loveliness and animation, oppressed him now, and yet he could not go without taking leave of her. He joined her as she stood at one of the windows, looking out on the blue-grey dusk and the lines of lighted lamps across the Park. 'Good-bye, Miss Chevening,' he said.

She turned to him. 'Are you going?' she said, and then her *nonchalance* left her. 'Don't go just yet. There is something I want to tell you first—about Allen,' she added.

He held his breath; if he could have spoken he would have tried to prevent her—he was in terror of some further insincerity.

'I left you to suppose downstairs,' she began, in a rapid, breathless manner, with a glance back into the room beyond to make sure that she was not overheard, 'I let you suppose that there was nothing to tell about him. There was a great deal—only,' and she smiled faintly, 'when there are two maid-servants on the other side of a table listening with all their ears, it is not *quite* the most convenient time for unlocking the family skeleton.'

He felt his doubts giving way with every word she spoke—in what a hurry he had been to judge her! 'It was indiscreet of me to ask as I did,' he admitted. 'I ought to have known better.'

'Oh, I don't know—how were you to anticipate? Even I—but I had better tell you. My unhappy step-brother has destroyed his last chance; he never even gave the indigo factory a trial, he ran away on the voyage out, and his father has refused to have anything more to do with him. We have heard nothing since. Now you know all that there is to know,' she concluded.

He drew a deep breath of relief; his chief sensation was an intense thankfulness that she had told him this herself, and shown his suspicions of her candour to be so monstrously unjust. In the revulsion of feeling he was not inclined to dwell, as he might have done at some other time, upon the tone in which her announcement was made.

'I had hoped for better news,' he said gravely; 'I am more sorry than I can say.'

Orme was sincerely sorry, and yet, to himself, the words sounded hollow and conventional—for it was not of Allen that he was thinking most just then.

'I knew you would be,' she said; 'you always had a great belief in him.'

'I don't understand it,' he answered slowly; 'it seems so strange that he should have thrown up a plan without a trial—when it was his own idea, after persuading you to obtain his father's consent. What do you suppose his object could have been?'

'I have not tried to suppose,' she replied, 'and, Mr. Orme, you will understand, I am sure, that after what has happened, it is—not a very pleasant subject to me. It would be a great relief for me to feel that it is not to be revived between us again. He has chosen to cut himself adrift from us all. It can do no possible good to be for ever discussing the whole miserable business over and over again, whenever we meet—*can* it?' She said this with a certain feverish impetuosity, and evident weariness of the subject.

'I suppose not,' he agreed. 'I will not distress you like this again, Miss Chevening.'

'You will not? Thank you so much! Is it very hard-hearted of me to say this? I can't help it, and you must not suppose that I am not sorry for him, or that I don't think of all this sometimes, and wish it could have been different—only I *hate* talking about it so—you do understand, don't you?'

A man must have been much less in love than Orme was to resist her just then, so winningly did she make that appeal, so wistfully anxious was she to retain his good opinion.

He went away more subjugated than ever. If the contrast between her, in her luxury and gaiety, and her step-brother, the son of the house, in exile, no one knew where, struck his imagination, he did not reproach her in his thoughts. She was not responsible for it; he believed that her heart was more touched by it than she chose to acknowledge.

And if he could have wished to see more signs of this, if she was really incapable of feeling all the compassion for Allen that might be wished, were there not many excuses for her? Was it not to her credit that she made no pretences?

So he argued with himself—and never had he been more easy to convince.

CHAPTER III.

WARNED.

Can I part her from herself, and love her, as I knew her, kind?

Locksley Hall.

WHITSUNTIDE had come, and Nugent Orme was spending it at the Vicarage. This time one powerful element of attraction was wanting, for Miss Chevening was not in Gorsecombe. But she was not in town either, as he happened to know, for Mrs. Chadwick and her two eldest daughters were away on a short visit, so that Orme's

appreciation of home life was not troubled by thoughts of any sacrifices entailed. Thanks, too, to Guy Hotham and Mrs. Antrobus, he now enjoyed frequent opportunities of seeing Margot Chevening, and every meeting since the afternoon of the Drawing-room had left him more deeply in love, more determined to speak to her at the first propitious moment. The moment had not come as yet; indeed, of late her former frank friendliness had given place to a constraint, almost a coldness, which he took as a discouraging symptom.

Here in the peaceful Vicarage he found a temporary relief from the distracting alternations of hope and despair he had been going through, in addition to the heavy work of his profession during the past term. His mind was as full of her as ever, but insensibly his thoughts took a more hopeful cast.

More than once he felt tempted to confide in Millicent, in order to find out how his prospects looked in her eyes, but he could not bring himself to do so. It not unfrequently happens that a man's sister is the person whom he finds it most difficult to consult in matters of the heart. A sister is apt occasionally to see her brother's tender passion in a frivolous or even a comic light, especially when she happens to be acquainted with the object of it. Not that Millicent was a girl to do this, or that Orme feared any want of sympathy on her part; there had always been a complete understanding between them, in spite of the difference in their characters.

But a feeling he could not account for made him guard his secret even from her for some days after his arrival, and then it was Millicent who first approached the subject.

It was a lovely evening in early June, and they were pacing the lawn together after dinner, as the first star came softly out in the apple-green sky over the common, and a sad, subdued tone deadened without confusing all the form and colour around them.

'I forgot to ask you whether you saw Mr. Chadwick when you went up there this afternoon?' said Millicent.

'Oh, yes, he was at home,' he answered; 'he struck me as having altered, Millie. He talked rather wildly once or twice. Does he drink, do you know?'

'They say so,' she admitted rather reluctantly. 'He never goes anywhere now. But what made you go and call upon him? I did not know you were particularly fond of him.'

'I'm not, and I felt less fond of him than ever this afternoon; he did nothing but abuse fashion and extravagance and women, and was altogether so incoherent and generally unpleasant that I was glad to get away.'

'But why did you go to see him at all, dear? It wasn't at all necessary, surely.'

'Oh!' said Orme, 'I went to get some pieces of music Miss Chevening asked me to find for her.'

To his sister's fine ear he betrayed himself by the almost im-

perceptible lingering over the surname, as if he found (as he did) a subtle pleasure in merely pronouncing it.

'Then you have seen Margot lately—often, Nugent?'

'Pretty often—yes,' he replied; he was not unwilling to speak of her just then, he was almost ready to pour all his doubts and fears, his hope and ambition, into Millicent's ear; it was the place and hour for such confidences. 'Why do you ask?' he added.

'I was wondering,' said Millicent, as she halted in the deeper dusk under the great cedar. 'Will you tell me something if I ask you?' she continued after a pause. 'I used to fancy you would come to me first, if you—had news. Is there anything between you and Margot?'

'No, Millie, not yet.'

'I am so glad!' she said. 'I was afraid it was too late to speak.'

'Why should you be afraid, Millie?—you know her. Is there someone else—someone about here?—I must know if there is.'

'No—no; not that I have heard of—it isn't that, Nugent.'

'Then I don't care,' he said.

'You have really fallen in love with her?' she asked anxiously. 'Is it serious, Nugent?'

'As serious as it can be,' he said. 'You seem to have a very poor opinion of my prospects, Millie.'

'Nugent, believe me it will be better for you to forget her if you can—you will be happier in the end!'

'Excellent advice, but not very practical, Millicent. I *can't* forget her. I don't want happiness if that's to be the price of it. I may have no chance, as you seem to think, but I'm not exactly going to give up in advance.'

'Tell me why you love her. Because she is beautiful—or because you believe she is good?'

'What questions! I love her because she is herself—that is enough for me, Millicent.'

'But if you were mistaken in her, if she were not what you think her?—oh, I know I shall make you angry with me—but indeed, indeed she is not worthy of you; she is not—not good, Nugent!'

'And this is your idea of friendship!' he cried scornfully.

'I was her friend once—not now. Dear Nugent, be patient with me. I would not speak now if it were too late to be of any use. But I cannot stand by and let my only brother throw his heart away like this—I cannot. I want to save you from doing what you will repent of some day. No—wait, listen. I know how sweet she can be, how lovely she is to look at. There was a time when I should have been glad to have her for my sister. That was before I knew how cruel she really was, how merciless she can be under all that sweetness.'

Hideous doubts, reviving and clutching his heart as he listened, kept him a listener still.

‘What have you to say against her?’ he said. ‘Let us have it out.’

‘You cannot know the part she took in sending that poor step-brother of hers away!’

‘I do know it,’ he said. ‘I know that in what she did she was anxious only for his benefit. He represented that he was longing to go out and shift for himself on this Bengal plantation—he begged her to help him and get his father’s consent. She did. Was it her fault that it turned out badly or that his fancy did not last, or was a sham to start with? She disliked him, I know; she owned it from the first; but then, at least, she was honestly trying to do her best for him;—and you make that a reproach against her! As if she can be made responsible for results no one could foresee at the time. Do you call that religion and charity?’

‘Did *she* tell you that he was anxious to go out? It is not true, Nugent. Listen to me—you must. I never meant to let this pass my lips, but you are more to me than she is, and I must say what I know. Allen Chadwick did *not* want to go. So far from that, he begged and prayed to stay at home, and it was Margot—for what reason I don’t know—who was allowed to decide whether he should be sent away or not. She insisted, in spite of his entreaties, that he must go. She and no one else is to blame for all that followed.’

‘That is enough, Millicent,’ he interrupted roughly. ‘Do you suppose I can’t see what it is that embitters you against her? You can’t forgive her for being beautiful. If you were able to judge fairly, you would not condescend to repeat this silly village gossip—you would feel as I feel, that it disproves itself!’

‘Nugent,’ said Millicent gravely, ‘it is not village gossip. Be more just to me. Should I tell you all this unless I knew it to be true? Poor Allen Chadwick told me himself how he dreaded the idea of being sent away; the last time I met him he was more hopeful—it was left to Margot to decide. The next thing I heard was that he had gone. I taxed Margot with it—and, Nugent, she admitted everything! She knew how reluctant he was to go out and how unlikely to prosper there, but she wished to be relieved of him and decided for his being banished. She did not even seem to see that she had done anything to be ashamed of. He was in England still at the time, and I implored her to get him recalled even then; I pointed out that he would almost certainly be driven to despair and ruin—but she would not yield. Nugent, can you hear that a girl you love has done this and not feel some change towards her? If you can, it is a beautiful face and nothing else that you love, and such love as that must end in certain misery.’

Nugent sat down on the bench under the cedar and covered his face. Millicent’s words, spoken without animus, with such intense earnestness, dropped conviction into his soul like a corrosive acid.

It was impossible to disbelieve her, strive as he might. Various circumstances which had puzzled and pained him at the time came

back now with terrible corroborative force. For the first time he saw their significance. Those indications of remorse on Margot's part, which he had thought the effect of a generous heart and an over-sensitive conscience, were miserably inadequate for such a wrong as hers.

He no longer wondered that she should have attempted to keep him in ignorance of what had become of Allen, or that she should order the subject to be dropped between them in future.

The revolution this wrought in his conceptions of her can hardly be over-stated. He had seen, of course, and not without a certain comprehension, her strong antipathy to Allen. But he had pictured her as overcoming it, setting herself to see and encourage what was good in him, acting as his confidant and ally in carrying out his rash project of trying his fortune in India; she had seemed the more lovable and sweet for this condescension.

And all that it seemed had never been! He had been deluded by his love and by her own skill in distorting facts. The project was hers—not Allen's: what she had done was only in furtherance of her own selfish aims; she had forced him into exile, careless what became of him so long as she gained her end; she had done this in spite of entreaties and reproaches, in the full knowledge of what must follow. And now, when the natural end had come, and this poor unloved, unoffending Allen was swallowed up by the quicksand into which her hand had thrust him, she looked as sweet and fair and innocent as ever; her laugh was as true, her gaiety as real, as if no thought of what she had done ever seriously troubled her peace!

The girl, whose heart all his hopes had long been set on winning, was capable, then, of such cruelty and callousness as this? Would his love survive this disenchantment? Had it already received its deathblow? His brain was too bruised and stunned as yet for any self-examination of this sort.

For anything he could tell, he might be unable to conquer his love for her, in spite of everything, but all that was best and highest in that love would have departed from it for ever. Already he foresaw the misery of a passion which judgment condemned!

He sat there silent so long that Millicent could not forbear from some expression of compassion. 'Poor boy,' she said, laying her hand upon his shoulder, 'I know how hard it is for you—but isn't it better to know this now than afterwards—when it might be too late!'

He shook off her hand impatiently. 'For God's sake, don't try to console me,' he said. 'I'm not in the mood to stand that just yet!'

'I only want to be quite sure that you are not angry with me, dear,' she pleaded; 'and—and, Nugent, you won't go on caring for her after this, will you?'

She was too anxious to discover the precise effect of what she had told him to exercise the little tact she possessed.

'How do I know?' he said, looking up with a white face. 'One doesn't get over these things all at once, Millicent.'

'But you do believe what I say?' she persisted. 'You will not take her word against mine?'

Till that moment it had not occurred to him to dispute the substantial accuracy of her account, but her injudicious insistence had the effect she least intended.

'You may be perfectly right,' he said, 'but why should you be afraid of my asking her for her version?'

'Oh, Nugent,' she cried, 'don't do that; be content with mine. Try not to see her again; it is wiser, believe me!'

'Wise or foolish, I *shall* see her again. I shall ask her myself about this. I will not judge her without knowing more than I do now—I don't doubt what you have told me, but—but there may be other circumstances which you have not heard of, which would explain everything.'

'She will persuade you so, no doubt,' said Millicent bitterly.

'She is not likely to care to take the trouble,' he replied. 'You will probably have the satisfaction of separating us, whatever the real facts may be. You have not wasted your evening, Millicent.'

'Ah, Nugent,' she said tearfully, 'don't speak like that to me; have I any other object but your happiness?'

He was too sore to be just or rational just then.

'If that is so,' he retorted, 'I'm afraid your efforts are a little unfortunate. You had better go in now—the mother has come to the window to look for us.'

'Are you coming in too, Nugent?'

'You think a cup of tea will be a remedy? No, thank you, Millicent. I'm better left alone just now. Go—and for heaven's sake don't let them see you've been crying!'

He turned abruptly down the path to the garden gate and out upon the road, leaving Millicent to make what excuses she could for him. 'I thought you were never coming in,' said Mrs. Orme. 'What have you and Nugent been gossiping about all this time?'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Millicent vacantly; 'there were so many things to talk about—may I put the shade on that lamp, dear, it dazzles my eyes so?'

Meanwhile Nugent was hurrying aimlessly on through the warm dark night. As he set out, the upper windows in the village street were gleaming yellow under their black gables. When he passed them again on his return, they reflected the livid grey-green of a new dawn, and the air had grown chill, and the birds in the Vicarage garden were beginning to utter their first sleepy and tentative chirps.

Where he had been in the meantime he hardly knew, beyond a vague impression of striding on along the grey high road, under black arching elms, past woods faint with wild hyacinths, through shuttered villages, his mind the whole time painfully striving with the problem of his future relations with Margot.

If what he had heard was true, it was impossible that he could ever think of her in the same way again. *Was it true?* The longer he thought of it the greater grew the improbability that Millicent could have invented or been seriously mistaken in her facts.

He had declared that he would appeal to Margot herself, but in his cooler state he began to see how difficult this would be, how unlikely to end in any satisfactory solution. She had already forbidden the subject: she would probably refuse to admit his right to reopen it.

Even if she denied the charge ever so indignantly and haughtily, would he believe her? He knew in his heart that he would not.

And with all this, he felt that his love was not killed; in the midst of his fiercest indignation her vivid face came before him like a challenge to turn away from her and forget her if he could. He despised himself for this bondage of the reason to the senses, but he was powerless to effect his liberty.

There was even a time in the course of that night's walk in which he felt the temptation to do and say nothing, to acquiesce in the lowering of his ideal and shut his eyes to all that would revolt him in any other person. What if she were unscrupulous, selfish, pitiless to another, was he so immaculate himself as to condemn her? What mattered anything so long as he could gain her love. Why should he make Allen's cause his own, now that he could do him no good by it.

But this mood did not last. Some men might have taken this cynical view and acted upon it—but not Orme. His detestation of conduct such as he believed hers to have been was too thorough; he would have pardoned almost anything else—certainly any wrong to himself—but he felt it would be weakness here—weakness that would bring its own punishment.

And yet, if they met, if he were again under the spell of her eyes and her voice, could he be sure of his power to resist? No, he decided; he might yield, if she chose to persuade him, but he had strength at least to keep out of temptation. He would avoid her, he would go nowhere where he had any reason to expect to find her. Should he meet her, it would be in some crowd where nothing but ordinary civilities would be required of him. It was not an heroic course, but it was better than an ignominious surrender.

With this resolution, wrung from him after a long and wearying struggle, he came home with a feeling that the crisis had passed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TORTURES OF INDECISION.

Les violences qu'on se fait pour s'empêcher d'aimer sont souvent plus cruelles que les rigueurs de ce qu'on aime.—*La Rochefoucauld*.

ORME came back to town strong in his new resolve; he declined one or two invitations to houses where there was a distinct probability that he would meet Miss Chevening; he called at the Hyde Park house and left the music she had asked him to get for her, but went away without having inquired whether Mrs. Chadwick was at home.

He took up his work with desperate energy; he had several cases on his hands just then which called for all his attention, and for a time they served as a sufficient distraction from his private cares; he even began to believe that he was cured, and that his hurt had been less deep than he had fancied.

But when the press of work subsided and he was comparatively unoccupied, he awoke to the blank dreariness of the life he had set himself to lead; the novelty and exciting sense of effort which lend a certain interest to the first stage of most self-denying ordinances had already disappeared. He groaned at his own inconsistency, at being able neither to feel as before towards Margot, nor to cast her wholly out of his thoughts.

He was thinking of all this one night when Hotham came up to his room. Orme had seen little of him of late, though they occupied the same house; for the younger man spent few of his evenings at home, and besides, being no early riser, had not shown himself in chambers for a considerable time.

So Nugent was glad to see him enter now. Guy's cheery talk was a welcome relief to his own gloomy meditations. 'Knew you wouldn't have turned in just yet,' said Guy as he came in, buttoning an elaborately braided smoking coat over his evening dress, 'so I thought I'd come in and have a chat. Haven't had one for an age.'

'You're not in as early as this as a rule,' remarked Orme, 'which accounts for it.'

'Been dining with Mrs. Chadwick. Didn't care about going on anywhere afterwards. I tell you what, Orme, I'm getting awfully hard hit over that second daughter, Ida, and I don't believe,' he added plaintively, 'she cares a single blow about me! She's so young, you see. She don't understand what love and all that sort of thing means. Not that I'd have her different, that's the great charm of her to me. Think of knowing that one would be the very

first in a girl's heart. When a girl's been through two or three seasons, you *can't* feel that. I don't know if you are like me, but I couldn't bear the idea that a girl had cared for any other fellow before me.'

'What does it matter?' said Orme, 'so long as she has left off caring for him. You're too exacting. Could you fulfil the same condition yourself?'

'That's different,' said Guy. 'Call it absurd if you like, that's the feeling I have about it.' And then he went off into a rhapsody, expatiating on Ida's perfections. Orme heard him patiently; he was not particularly interested in Ida, who struck him as unformed and somewhat characterless, but she was Margot's sister—Guy had probably met Margot herself that evening—he longed, in spite of his resolves, to hear her name.

'I tell you everything about *my* love affair,' said Guy, when he had exhausted the subject, 'but you never tell me how things are going between you and the fair Miss Margot! She was saying this evening that she never saw you now. You could have met her at several places lately if you had taken the trouble.'

'I've been busy,' said Orme.

'You would have managed to go all the same, if you had cared about it. I don't want to be indiscreet, old fellow, but have you quarrelled?'

'No.'

'Then why are you fighting shy of her like this?'

'Because I've come to the conclusion t's the wisest thing to do, if you want to know.'

'Well, you know best, but you're not likely to get her if you never go near her, you know—*are* you?'

'Look here, Guy, it's as well to have this understood. I was mistaken in what I told you about Miss Chevening some time ago—you must forget it.'

'Mistaken? Not you—I know better. Do you think I didn't see how you brightened up at her very name?' said Guy, with a simple boyish pride in his own penetration. 'Come, don't you be an old ass, Orme. I doubt if it's anything like so hopeless as you seem to think—anyway, where's the sense of throwing away all your chances to gratify your precious pride?'

'You don't understand.'

'Don't I? Well, you don't deserve it, but I'm going to give you one more chance. If you let this go, I shan't take any more trouble about it. I've induced my aunt to get up a water-party next Saturday—she has a mortal funk of a boat, but that's neither here nor there. The Chevening girls are going—I settled all that this evening—I've undertaken to find some men to come and row. Will you come?'

'I don't see how I could get away in time,' said Orme irresolutely.

'Ah, there you are! But you ought to know, if you don't, that

the Courts won't sit at all on Saturday. I saw it in the paper to-day, there's a meeting of the Judges, or something; *now* what excuse have you got ?'

Orme sat reflecting; he was a little ashamed of his own cowardice, he must meet Margot at some time, why not get it over? Might not the effect of meeting her face to face after what he knew be to break the spell?

He caught even at so flimsy a pretext as this. 'Very well,' he said at last, 'I'll come.' But if he had not already felt the hollowness of this philosophy, the load that was lifted from his spirits, the sense he had of recovered interest in life, should have sufficed to undeceive him.

Yet, when Saturday came, and, as the party assembled on the Paddington platform, he saw her once more, he felt a sudden fear of himself. Why could he not restrain his heart from beating faster at the sight of her? Why did the mere touch of her gloved hand send the old thrill through him? He was far indeed from a cure as yet, as he acknowledged to himself in humiliation. But he must harden his heart against her, and he would remember that this same girl, who stood there with her exquisite face and sparkling eyes in almost childlike anticipation of enjoyment, was utterly without heart, capable of sacrificing anyone who stood in her path with the most consummate selfishness. The thought of Allen—what he might have been, and what, owing to her, he was—came to Nugent's aid now.

'I thought we should have met before this,' she was saying, 'or I should have written to thank you for getting those songs for me.'

'It was not worth it,' he replied with a guilty consciousness of the treasure her letter would have been to him.

'You might have spared time to come in!' she said; 'we were all at home that afternoon.'

'Thank you; I was not able to come in, unfortunately.'

'Really? But no doubt your time is very much occupied.' She spoke lightly enough, and yet there was a suspicion of pain in the mockery that lit her eyes.

'It is,' he said; he felt that he was going to the other extreme in his efforts to withstand her, and that she saw and resented his brusqueness, but he could not help it.

'And yet you are going to give up a whole day! Isn't that rather unwise?'

'Possibly—but I will take the risk.'

She made no answer, a coldness was established between them as they stood there, and presently she turned and walked on with the others towards the train, Orme followed without keeping at her side. They were too many for all to travel in the same compartment, and he deliberately chose the one in which she was not. His reflections during the short journey to Taplow were sombre enough. He called himself a fool for coming—doubly a fool for

being unable to command himself better. Why could he not trust himself to look at her, to speak to her: what would she care whether he kept away or not? All the way down he was picturing her in the adjoining compartment, straining his ears to catch her voice, her clear low laugh, and still he knew that, in avoiding her, he would be sparing himself much distress of mind in the future.

He had been impatient for the train to stop and give him the opportunity of seeing her again, but when this happened and they were all walking down to the landing-stage, he could not bring himself to approach her. He sought a safeguard in the society of one of his fellow-travellers—a young lady who had come in high-heeled shoes, and a dust cloak as a useful precaution on the river. Her remarks were neither many nor particularly entertaining, but he tried to give his whole attention to listening and replying—anything to prevent his thoughts from straying to the graceful figure in front.

Where had all his indignation departed to? She had sunk infinitely below his ideal of her, forfeited her title to true and tender womanhood: what she had done was utterly repellent to him—yet, now that he saw her, he could not feel this repulsion.

Was his love unaltered, then, in spite of all? He knew that this could not be, that what remained was a passion robbed of all the spirituality that lifts love above the common earth. Should he descend to such a level—love without trust, without respect? Never, he swore to himself; he saw his danger, he knew his weakness, he would be on his guard for this one day, and be wiser in future.

So, during the inevitable discussion that took place on the Maidenhead landing-stage—for, like most water-parties, they had started with no very definite plan—Orme did not go near Miss Chevening or join more than was absolutely necessary in the rather protracted debate.

At last the arrangements got themselves settled in some way: it was decided to row as far up the river as time allowed, have afternoon tea in some river-side inn garden, and return to dinner at the hotel.

‘Now about boats?’ said Guy Hotham. ‘We’d better take three, I think. Miss Chevening, are you going to row?’

‘If I may,’ said Margot, who was stripping off her gloves. ‘I haven’t rowed for ever so long. I want to see if I have forgotten.’ She was charming in her splendid physical health and joyous vitality. Orme could not help allowing his eyes to dwell on her with something of the old wondering delight.

‘All right, then,’ he heard Hotham answer; ‘then will you take bow in this first boat? Your sister and I will look after the steering, and Orme will stroke—he’s a swell at it, rowed in his College boat up at Oxford. Where has he got to?’

Before Orme’s resolutions could be exposed to this fresh test, Miss Chevening had calmly interposed: ‘Not Mr. Orme, please,’

she said; 'my rowing is not up to the College standard. I would much rather not spoil his pleasure—and mine. Find me someone not quite so—superior.'

Gny did not, of course, permit himself to show any astonishment at this. 'Poor old Orme!' was his inward comment; 'not much chance there, I'm afraid. Girls are rum things—I thought she rather liked him than not.'

Whether Margot had intended Orme to hear her reply or not, he did hear it, and, inconsistently enough, was mortified. But the next moment he experienced a sardonic amusement of this revelation of his own lurking vanity and insincerity. What a miserable humbug, what a conceited prig he was, after all, he thought wrathfully; had he not determined to keep away from her? She had seen his intention and very naturally forestalled him. What else could he expect—what else in the name of common sense did he want? He had no right to be there at all if he could not avoid ridiculous Byronics; whatever he felt and must feel, he would forswear posing.

So he did his best to throw off all unhealthy sentiment, and devote himself to entertaining Mrs. Antrobus and the young lady of the dust-cloak as they sat in front of him, expressing their admiration of river scenery with the ghastly smiles of nervous persons who are carrying their lives in their hands.

And in course of time he succeeded in removing their worst terrors and convincing them that they might feel tolerably safe under his care and that of his companion. Mrs. Antrobus became more and more gracious as her alarm vanished, and, being a chatty and lively old lady on *terra firma*, was gradually drawn into displaying almost her normal powers of conversation. Orme, somewhat to his surprise, found himself able to talk and laugh, even to feel a growing pleasure in all his surroundings, in the scent of the late hawthorn and meadowsweet on the banks, the cool shade of the noble woods as they glided past, the deep-blue sky, veined and streaked like marble with pure white, and in the musical plash of the sculls as they struck the water.

The boats kept together as much as possible, and sometimes Margot's was near enough to allow him to notice the grace and ease with which she managed her sculls, the unsuspected capacity of those soft and shapely hands of hers; her voice reached him across the water—such a clear, sweet voice, with that delicate inflection of haughtiness. Now and then they came to a lock, with its pretty rustic cottage and gay little garden of rose-trees, stocks, and marigolds; and here, though he had to give his attention to keeping his boat away from posts and chains while the water rose, not one of Miss Chevening's looks or words escaped him as she sat close by.

But he was able to take note of her almost dispassionately now. She might look as distractingly lovely as ever, turn the head, as she seemed in a fair way to do, of the good-looking youth in the stroke

seat, Orme felt no jealousy ; he had resigned all his own pretensions ; what harm was there in studying her, so long as he remembered that he must beware of anything more ?

When they landed for afternoon tea at a river-side inn garden, she made some indifferent little remark to him, as if she did not choose to allow anything so pronounced as a mutual avoidance, and he was glad to take the way of escape offered him from the straits into which his own want of self-command had brought them. But although they talked for some little time, he could see that she did so for form's sake, and perfectly understood and was satisfied that the friendship between them was at an end.

He did not sit near her when tea was brought out under the trees on the lawn, but he observed that she was amongst the most lighthearted of the party ; her laughter had a painful sound to his ear. Yet why should she not laugh ? She was giving up nothing.

Well, thank Heaven, the worst was over now ! There was not much more of this day to get through ; they would be rowing home soon, and he would be out of sight of her dear face. He felt that his attitude of dispassionate study was not tenable after all.

But when the time came for re-embarking, Mrs. Antrobus took it into her head to rearrange the crews, with the result that Orme had to give up his sculls to a young man who had not been rowing as yet.

'Miss Chevening, will you come in my boat, please ?' she said ; 'I am sure you must want some rest.'

'I'm not a bit tired !' said Margot eagerly. 'Indeed I would rather row—if you don't mind !'

'Then you shall. Mr. Orme, will go up to that little seat in the end, and you can take the place next to it.'

The other boats were already occupied, and Margot had nothing to do but consent, though she would perhaps have preferred to excuse herself. She was obliged to accept Orme's hand in stepping into the boat, which she did without looking at him.

After all, it was Orme who had least cause to welcome an arrangement which broke through all his resolutions, and yet he was disagreeably conscious of a secret satisfaction in being in her near neighbourhood. He need not speak to her, only lie there in a sort of dream, listening to the tinkle and murmur of the water at the bows, and lazily watching the flakes of liquid light contracting, expanding, and interlacing over the olive-green ripples, while his eyes returned again and again to the figure immediately before him. Her face was hidden from him, except that, as she turned her head now and then, he had a glimpse of the pure oval of her cheek, touched by the mellow light.

How could she look so innocent of all that was cold and cruel, and yet be what she was ?—what she must be, if Millicent had spoken truth ? What if he carried out his first intention after all, and asked Margot to tell him her story ? Oh, it was too late for that ! This afternoon had sundered them too far to make it ever

possible to ask for any explanation with the slightest hope that she would deign to give it.

Then he came to himself with a start. How much longer would he vacillate like this? Had he not realised long ago that no explanation she could give would alter the impression of Millicent's words? Let him be thankful, then, that he was saved from the temptation of ignobly condoning what he knew should steel his heart against her for ever.

In the meantime it was sweet, subtly, poisonously sweet, to lie there and fancy what might have been.

But here something happened which put an end to all idle dreaming of this kind. As he lay there in the bows he was startled by the sound of oars seemingly close behind them, and turned to see a racing ship bearing down on them at a good rate.

'Oh, dear!' cried Mrs. Antrobus helplessly, 'there's a boat right in front of us; what ought I to do *now*?' For the good lady, owing to the incapacity of her young friend in the dust-cloak, had been holding the rudder-lines, with the management of which she was scarcely more familiar. Being requested to 'pull to the right—hard,' she naturally hauled at the left with all the energy of complete flurry, and Orme, shouting to warn the approaching oarsmen, who had no coxswain, leaned forward with outstretched hand to break the shock of the collision which was now inevitable. Unfortunately for him, he had not calculated for the way on the other boat—the iron-tipped prow of the light ship caught his hand, and crushed it against the gunwale of the boat he was in, wedging it in the cleft it made in the upper plank. Neither boat, however, possibly owing to his interposition, was injured seriously; there was the usual confusion and exchange of slightly recriminatory apologies, and then both boats went on their way.

'What stupid people!' Mrs. Antrobus remarked placidly, 'not to look where they were going to. I quite expected we should all be upset. You are sure no water can come through that crack, Mr. Orme?'

'It's all right,' he called to her. 'Well above the water!'

'I'm very glad it was no worse,' she said. 'I *do* wish people wouldn't be so careless!'

'I think,' remarked Margot over her shoulder, 'that you might have kept a more careful look-out, Mr. Orme,—you had nothing else to do!'

He was setting his teeth hard to repress a groan; trivial as the accident sounds, it caused him the most exquisite pain; his thumb was laid open to the bone, and was bleeding copiously; he tried to hold it in the water, but that only increased the burning throb which turned him sick and faint. And in the midst of all this came Miss Chevening's little gibe which sounded unfeeling enough just then.

'You are rather hard on me!' he managed to say in a low voice.

'Am I?' she returned. 'I think people should not come out on these expeditions unless they intend to make themselves either useful or agreeable. I can't compliment you on having exhibited either quality at present.'

'I did not ask for compliments.'

'You do not give yourself the trouble to deserve them,' she answered, feeling secure in the knowledge that their conversation was inaudible to anyone else in the boat.

A pause, during which he was endeavouring to staunch the blood with his handkerchief.

'I do not see,' observed Miss Chevening at last, 'why two persons who have been on tolerably good terms for some time should suddenly behave with absolute incivility to one another.'

'Are we uncivil?'

'Are we! Are we not? Have you made a solitary remark of your own free will since we started an hour ago?'

'I might reply,' he said grimly—he was almost beside himself with physical pain—'that your own efforts were not exactly conciliatory.'

'Perhaps not. Why should I conciliate? Why do you need conciliating?'

He was silent; the present was no time for explaining, even if he had felt equal to it just then; as it was, this unexpected attack of hers in the state he was in tried his nerves and temper almost past endurance.

'You don't seem to have any answer to give me,' she continued remorselessly.

'Forgive me,' he said faintly; 'I—I am really not quite myself just now—don't think me ungracious if I ask you to spare me all these questions.'

She laughed. 'I have brought that on myself,' she said. 'I shall be careful how I invite such a hint again. Let me recommend you to smoke. I shall not mind in the least, and you are evidently in want of a sedative.'

He did not answer. The pain he was in was so great as to make him almost unconscious, but through it all he felt the injustice of her speech. Should he tell her? What would she care? A pinched thumb was not an accident to make a fuss about; he did not want to make Mrs. Antrobus uncomfortable, or spoil the pleasure of the party; he could bear the pain—only, it must be in silence.

It was not until they were in Boulter's lock that Miss Chevening addressed him again. 'I don't pretend to be useful in a lock,' she said. 'Surely you might exert yourself to that slight extent, Mr. Orme!'

'I beg your pardon,' he said, stretching out his left hand for the boathook. 'I thought stroke was doing all that was necessary.'

'Wouldn't you on the whole be more successful in hooking that chain if you used your right hand?' she suggested.

He had been keeping it behind him as far as possible. 'No doubt,' he replied wearily; 'but it's slightly disabled for the moment.'

Her eyes lost their mockery in an instant as she read the suffering in his face. 'How did you do it?' she asked. 'Let me see it, please; I may be of some use!'

'You had better not; it is not a pleasant sight. Never mind about it now, Miss Chevening, I don't want Mrs. Antrobus to know.'

'Show it to me at once,' she said. 'Oh, how dreadful!—and how it is bleeding! Why did you not tell me? Let me bind it up for you. Yes, you must!'

She took her own handkerchief and bound it round the wound with slim fingers which were gentle and firm, though her face was pale and her lips quivering a little. Orme felt too weak to protest; a moment before, and he had been thinking bitterly that she was indeed incapable of any tenderness, yet her whole expression now was softened by the sweetest compassion. When would he succeed in forgetting the touch of her hands as they ministered to him? He tried to thank her, but she stopped him: 'I have only done what I should do for anybody,' she said hurriedly. 'This is a truce, you know. Directly you land you must go and see a surgeon. We won't frighten dear Mrs. Antrobus by telling her till it is all over, will we? But I wish you had let me know before.'

As soon as they were at Maidenhead again, Margot found Hotham and made him take Orme in search of a surgeon, and after one or two fruitless visits they found an old gentleman who did all that was necessary.

Orme came back with the pain considerably relieved, and found the rest of the party already at dinner, a vacant seat had been left for him next to Margot's, and he took it with a secret gratification.

By this time his hostess had heard about the accident, and he was able to assure her that it was trifling enough. 'You don't think you'll have lockjaw?' she said anxiously. 'I've known of it coming on when the thumb was injured. You are sure you feel able to eat? Lockjaw's such a dreadful thing to have! And so you hurt your hand in that last lock? I detest locks! I can't think why they have them on the river at all—dangerous hindrances I call them!'

She had no suspicion that her own erratic steering had contributed to Nugent's accident, for which he was thankful.

His hand was bandaged in a manner which made it difficult to use his knife, as Miss Chevening presently discovered. 'If you are not too independent,' she said, with a touch of shyness, 'you had better let me cut up your food for you.'

He protested, laughing, that he would not trouble her, and persevered.

'Why are you so obstinate?' she said at last, after watching his unavailing efforts. 'You know you are perfectly helpless! It is,

not a very overwhelming obligation, I should have thought,' she added, a little wistfully.

He had to yield and allow her to render him this prosaic service, which she performed with a serious dignity that lent it a mysterious charm.

It was pleasant—that dinner in the hotel room, with the French windows opening on the lawn and its rose trees, and the river, where the passing boats left a sparkling white trail as they glided by in the dusk. How could he help being sensible of the dangerous attractiveness of his lovely neighbour? Was it wonderful that the yearning returned to believe her all he had once imagined, the insidious desperate hope that, if he had courage to appeal to her, the shadow that stood between them might by some inexplicable means be made to disappear?

But he saw no real prospect of it; she would not even give him the opportunity of speaking now, supposing he were willing. This was only a truce, as she seemed constantly to be reminding him; very soon they would be on their way to town, and he would see her no more. She had far too much spirit not to accept the total estrangement he had suggested.

Be it so, then—it brought him back to his original position. Nothing could be done; the barrier between them was not to be removed without ignoring her conduct to Allen. He could not ignore it—he should despise himself if he could. And unless he could do this, the less he saw of her in future the better for his own honour and happiness.

So when they adjourned to the lawn for coffee, he devoted himself to Mrs. Antrobus with a thankful sense that his term of probation was nearly at an end.

The young lady in the dust-cloak, which nothing had induced her to remove throughout the day, had betrayed one constant anxiety, the fear that she would not return to town in time for a certain dance, and Mrs. Antrobus had accordingly arranged to go back by an earlier train for her sake.

And now the waiter appeared with the announcement that the flies were at the door and, if they wished to catch the earlier train, they must go at once. There was some amount of bustle and confusion before they could get off, and Orme found himself, without any contrivance on his own part, in the same open carriage as Margot, with Guy and Ida as the other occupants.

As they approached the station, a train passed along the high embankment in sharp relief against the green sky. The driver whipped his horse into a gallop. 'We shall miss it!' cried Guy. 'Our young friend in the dust-cloak will lose her dance, which will be a pity, for I believe she had dressed for it before she came out!'

'And that was why she kept the cloak on—to hide her ball-dress!' said Ida. 'She talked of nothing but dancing the whole day. It was all "Had we been to such a ball? Were we going to Mrs. So-and-So's dance?" So silly—as if it mattered!'

The train had stopped; as the fly rolled up to the end of the steps, they heard the whistle; they reached the platform to find it empty.

'They've gone on without us!' said Guy, without exhibiting any inconsolable depression. 'I daresay they thought we had got in somewhere. Well, *we* can't help it, can we?

'Since for that early train we're late,
We will not make our woes the text
Of sermons to the Times—but wait
On for the next!'

he quoted, adapting Calverley to his own purposes.

Margot had said nothing; she was already walking slowly towards the end of the platform. Ida, declaring that she was tired, had sat down, and Guy had followed her example. Orme stood for a moment irresolute—he could hardly allow Miss Chevening to promenade the platform alone; he would at least leave it to her to decline his escort if she chose, as she probably would choose.

She had turned and was coming towards him, looking subdued and sad, and a little weary, and he waited for her with a heart that began to beat faster. It might be that the opportunity he had half longed for, half dreaded, had come at last. If only he could feel sure what he would say or leave unsaid!

CHAPTER V.

MISS CHEVENING'S CANDOUR.

L'envie de faire voir nos défauts du côté que nous voulons bien les montrer fait une grande partie de notre sincérité.—*Le Rochefoucauld*.

'Is your hand still painful?' was Miss Chevening's first question, put after a moment of embarrassed silence and with a touch of very unusual timidity.

'A little,' he replied; 'nothing worth speaking of—it will be all right in a day or two.'

'It looked such a dreadful wound,' she said, closing her eyes tight, like a child, at the recollection. 'You must have thought I was very unfeeling in the boat,' she went on; 'but I had no idea that you were hurt at all until we were in that lock.'

'I quite understood,' he said heartily. 'Pray don't say anything more about it.'

She stood at the edge of the platform looking down on the rails and ballast for some time, and then she suddenly raised her eyes and turned to him: 'I wish,' she said impetuously, 'I wish you would tell me what I have done that displeases you.'

It was precisely the question he had been determined to avoid,

and yet, now that it had come, the temptation to appeal to her was very strong. He put it by for the time however—‘How have I shown that I was displeased?’ he said.

‘How? By your behaviour all through the day—you have not once spoken to me except when you could not possibly help yourself. If we had never met before, instead of being, as I thought only a little time ago, quite old friends, you could not have been more stiff and formal. It is useless to deny it, and, if you please, I am rather curious to know what it all means.’

She was trying to speak lightly and unconcernedly, but there was a real anxiety in her eyes—a wistful desire to know whether something she seemed to fear was true. Orme was moved in spite of himself; there was something frank and natural in this direct challenge which seemed inspired by a consciousness of innocence. If, after all, he had been too hasty to judge her; if—but he dared not indulge such a supposition—she *could* not be innocent.

‘I cannot tell you,’ he said, ‘without going into matters that you have forbidden me to speak about.’

‘Ah, then I can guess—it is something to do with Allen! There, I knew I was right—it is always Allen. I did ask you not to mention his name to me again, I remember; never mind, I give you leave to mention it now as much as you please—so long as you tell me what you have heard that seems to have given you such a bad opinion of me.’

‘I will tell you, then,’ he said bluntly. ‘I have heard that it was you who obliged him to leave home, against his will. Do you deny it?’

‘I was sure that Millicent had told you,’ she said. ‘No, why *should* I deny it? It is true.’

It was over. She had admitted it. His last feeble spark of hope had died. ‘And you made me believe he had gone out of his own free will; that it was his own plan which you had helped him to carry out!’

Margot coloured. ‘You assumed that it was so, and I did not choose to undeceive you. Was that very wicked of me?’

‘You had the right to refuse me your confidence if you thought fit. No—the wickedness (you used the word first) was not towards me.’

‘You *do* think I acted wickedly then?’ she said. ‘May I ask where you consider my wickedness lay?’

‘Where?’ he cried, all his indignation roused afresh by her insensibility. ‘Is it possible you need me to point it out to you? Ask yourself what harm that poor fellow had done to you, that you could not be content until he was sent out of your sight? Oh, I know all you would say. He irritated your nerves, offended your fastidiousness, made you ashamed of him in a hundred ways. Granted all that, was it any reason why you should use all your influence to have him sent away from his home, where he was honestly trying to improve, where his only chance of improvement

was? You knew, because you were warned, that the life you meant him to lead was one that he had no liking for, and as little fitness. You might have had some pity on him, and declined to condemn him, untrained, ill-regulated, friendless as he was, to exile; but you would not listen; you carried your point, and you cannot even see at what a cost to another you have purchased your own comfort! I am not good at hiding my thoughts. Knowing all this, I can't behave as if—as if it made no difference. It *does* make a difference—all the difference in the world, as far as I am concerned. Of course, I know very well that you can dispense easily enough with my friendship—I wish it was as easy for me to withdraw—as I must.'

'You are certainly outspoken,' she said haughtily; 'even Millicent was not more candid. It seems that I must resign myself to lose *your* friendship, too, then? I don't pretend not to feel a little sorry; I even think you are rather hard on me.' She turned away her head for a moment. 'If you knew more you might make some allowances for me, you might come to believe that I am not such a monster of hard-heartedness as you imagine; but I don't know—very likely I am as wicked as you say; it is not worth discussing my precise shade of iniquity!' She paused, and then resumed more gently: 'It is silly of me to care,' she said; 'but after all, I *do* care. I don't choose that you should go away with a worse impression than I deserve. I have a right to be heard in my own defence. I am going to tell you what nobody knows outside my own family; perhaps it is wrong, undignified, to speak at all after what you have said—but you will not misunderstand my motives. I am not begging for your friendship, I only wish you to know my side of the story.'

'You don't know all I had to bear. You speak of Allen as harmless, as if roughness and want of manners were his worst faults. If that had been all—but—but there are things I can't tell you. One thing I must. He was bad, *really* bad. Even at Trouville I saw that. He was—dishonest. Ah, you don't believe it; you think it is all prejudice, and you have made up your mind that he was ill-used—a poor, harmless, well-meaning creature! What will you say when I tell you that he was caught in the very act of stealing? He was—he stole a locket; a valuable locket belonging to me. It was his father—not I—who determined that the only course to take after that was to send him abroad. And then Allen begged to have his conduct passed over; to be allowed to live at home just as before, and, as I was the person he had—had robbed, they left it to me to say whether he should be sent away or not. Put yourself in my position for a moment. I disliked him (I have never disguised that—we all disliked him). I was afraid of him. I—I had reasons. After the way he had behaved, it was simply impossible to live on in the same house together. And—though of course you may not choose to believe me—I did honestly think that India was the best place for him;

that he would like his new life when he was once there; he kept from falling again into bad habits. My step-father himself took that view. What other answer could I give? If I could have foreseen—but how could I? So I said—what you know, and if I had to go through it all over again I should do exactly the same. I can't help it if it horrifies you—I know I should.'

To estimate the effect of her words upon Orme, it must be remembered how strong her personal fascination had been over him from the first; how impossible it had been to him, even when he most condemned what she had done, to feel harshly towards her.

He had spoken sternly, but it was the crime, not the criminal, that excited his indignation, and some of his sternness was due perhaps to a secret consciousness that he was only too much disposed to leniency.

And now he had heard her account—and he could hold out against her no longer. He never doubted that she was speaking the truth; her manner was too entirely convincing to admit of that, and her story gave him the excuse he had longed for and despaired of for acquitting her of all that had seemed most cold-blooded and unscrupulous.

Thank God, she was less to blame than he could ever have hoped to find her! If the part she had played was not the most merciful, at least it had been forced upon her; she had not acted without provocation—how great provocation and for how long, who could say?

Faulty as she might be, he knew the worst: it gave him no right to judge her, it made it no shame to love her still. Oh, the inexpressible relief of knowing that! What should he say to her? how retract the accusation he had presumed, in his self-righteous folly, to bring against her?

He was saved from the necessity of speaking immediately by the deafening rush and roar of an express through the station. When the long line of rocking carriages, with the comfortable profiles at the lighted windows, had passed, leaving a whirlwind of cold air in its wake, Margot came forward from the palings to which she had retreated. 'I am waiting for you to say something,' she said. 'I want to know what you think of all this—now I have told you?'

'What am I to say to you?' he said. 'If I had known all this I would have cut my tongue out sooner than say what I did! Why did you not tell Millicent what you have just told me?'

'Why? Because I did not choose. Do you think it is so easy and pleasant to expose one's family secrets? Besides, Millicent would not have listened—she would not have believed me, very likely. Are you quite sure that you believe me yourself?'

'You can't forgive me!' he cried. 'I don't wonder. But, indeed, I had no idea before that that poor fellow had any actual harm in him—it never entered my head that he was a scoundrel—'

that any temptation could have made him a thief! I was mistaken in him, it seems. If that had been my worst mistake—'

'And you don't think I was wrong in having him sent away?'

'Wrong? I don't know: I have no right to judge. Perhaps, if—bad as he was—you could have given him one more chance—But you say there are circumstances you can't tell me. I suppose there was no other course to take. And I ought to have known that you would not act lightly, or without compunction or pity for him. I ought to have felt that. Will you ever forgive me, Miss Chevening, for saying such things as I did to you? Are we still friends?'

She had recovered her ascendancy over him, but the victory seemed to have aroused the sense of injury—she could not bring herself to overlook his offence. Having humbled herself to make a particular statement to avoid forfeiting his regard, and, having succeeded, she could not yet forgive him for forcing such an explanation from her.

'Then you really do propose to honour me with your friendship after all!' she exclaimed. 'Had you not better reflect a little before you commit yourself again?'

'Now you are cruel!' he said in a low voice.

'No, I am not. Remember how solemnly you renounced any further acquaintance with me a few minutes ago. You oughtn't to be surprised if I feel a little doubt about our future relations. Naturally, I should like to be spared any repetition of to-day's—uncertainty!'

'Our future relations must depend on you—not me,' he said.

'Must they? Then I will try not to decide hastily. I will think over it; there will be plenty of time to do that before we meet again, and then I shall probably know better than I do now what I really feel about it. Don't let us say any more about it just now, and I think we had better go back to my sister and Mr. Hotham—our train must be almost due by this time.'

He obeyed gloomily enough. Clearly there was nothing to be gained by pressing her for an answer while she was in her present mood. He had offended her, and if she chose to treat him coldly in the future, or even drop him altogether, it would only be what he deserved. And, as he thought of this, he felt a bitterness rising in his heart against the absent and missing Allen, in whose unworthy cause he had incurred the crushing burden of his lady's displeasure.

On returning to the sheltered part of the station, where by this time a considerable crowd had collected, they found Guy Hotham and Ida still on the seat where they had been left. Ida rose and came to meet her sister; drawing her apart, 'Margot,' she said hurriedly, her face looking white and frightened under the gaslight, 'do you know who is here—on the platform?'

A certain apprehension was visible in the elder sister's face,

'Not—not Allen?' she exclaimed under her breath,

'No, no—Mr. Melladew.'

Margot's expression relaxed. 'Is that all, dear?' she said, with a laugh. 'What if he is?'

'Nothing,' said Ida nervously. 'Only I thought I would tell you—in case . . . Margot, you won't recognise him, will you?'

'I have no particular wish to speak to Mr. Melladew, dear; why are you so anxious that I should cut him dead?'

'Because I am,' said Ida impatiently. 'You will do as I ask you, Margot, won't you?'

'Certainly, dear. I should have done so in any case, for that matter. I don't suppose he is at all anxious for a recognition.'

The train came up just then, and the four had just secured an empty compartment when a fifth person entered. It was Melladew, somewhat altered from the slim and elegant tutor of two years ago; he had grown stouter and flabbier, he was less carefully dressed, he had evidently not been to Maidenhead for boating purposes. He took the middle seat between Orme and Ida, opposite to Margot. Ida had shrunk back, with a deep flush, and turned her face to the window, which seemed to disconcert him.

Poor Melladew bore it as long as he could. He had apparently counted upon being recognised, and Margot's eyes showed no consciousness of having seen him before; he seemed half inclined to recall himself to her recollection, but his courage failed him, as well it might. Finally, after growing more and more ill at ease, he left the carriage at the next station with a pathetic little sigh as he let down the glass.

'That fellow looked as if he fancied he knew you, Miss Chevening,' said Guy, after he had gone. 'He opened his mouth to speak once or twice, and then thought better of it.'

'He found out his mistake in time, I suppose,' said Margot indifferently. 'I hate having to tell people I don't know them, don't you?' And this led Guy to recount his own experiences of a similar kind, which had the desired effect of diverting the conversation from its original subject.

But the conversation soon flagged and became spasmodic; Ida took no part in it, and sat gazing abstractedly out into the darkness, while Guy was watching her with a cloud on his face; Margot lay back with her eyes closed, and Orme was silently reproaching himself for his own precipitate folly in speaking as he had done. How could he have taken up the cause of such a worthless being as Allen against a girl like this one opposite—a girl who, as his instinct should have told him, was sweet and noble and good? It was natural that she should shrink from her step-brother, natural that she should resent having to associate with him. Ought she to have borne with him, to have pleaded for him? No doubt a creature who was all angelic meekness would have done so—Margot Chevening was not meek: she was no angel, and he loved her the better for it. Allen had forfeited all his sympathy: he saw him now as an irreclaimably vicious young scamp, for whom exile was

probably a better fate than he deserved. And what had Margot done but declined to intervene? Orme grew hot as he thought of all his heroics. How could she pardon the things he had said to her? How could he pardon himself such sentimental quixotry?

And yet, in truth, he need not have been ashamed of his indignation—it was the effect of a generous sympathy with the unfortunate and oppressed; he had spoken under pressure, sacrificing his love to his sense of honour and justice; it was not his fault that he had not been more fully informed. Some would have held that, even on the facts, she had not cleared herself entirely from the charges that had been brought against her.

But with Orme the reaction was too complete; he loved her too well to have any reservations or self-justifications now. He was only too thankful to have it demonstrated to him that his love need not be renounced, that his divinity was not to be dethroned. And yet, as he realised bitterly, he had lost her again in the very act of regaining her! Ah, if only he had never listened to Millicent—if only he had had more confidence: but it was too late now for regrets of this sort, he must wait the course of events.

And at last—it seemed an interminable journey to more than one of the party—they were at Paddington, standing together under the bluish glare of the electric lights. While a hansom was being called for the two sisters, Orme found an opportunity to make one last appeal to Margot. 'I don't ask you to forgive me,' he said—'at least, not now, but think as kindly of me as you can. You don't know how severe a punishment it would be to me to feel I had lost your friendship past all recovery!'

Such humility was almost a provocation to trample upon it. 'Shall I tell you how you may make your punishment easier?' she asked.

'If you will!' he said, more hopefully.

'It is quite simple: you have only to forget our last conversation—then my friendship will be as undesirable as you seem to have been considering it all day. Good-night, Mr. Orme.'

She gave him her hand without looking at him, and he stood by helplessly while Guy Hotham put her into the hansom. Orme had a glimpse of her pale, proud profile as the cab passed him; she did not appear to notice his bow—she was mortally offended; he gazed after the hansom with a sigh. Just then his feeling towards Millicent was hardly brotherly.

'What have you done to poor Mr. Hotham, Ida?' asked Margot, as they drove home—'he seemed quite depressed; you haven't been quarrelling, have you?'

'No,' said Ida; 'at least, I don't know how it was. He was very pleasant while we were at Taplow—until that hateful Mr. Melladew came up and sat down quite close by us, and somehow it—it worried me so, Margot, and I couldn't go on talking, and I'm afraid Guy—Mr. Hotham—noticed it, for he changed directly.'

'But why should seeing Mr. Melladew worry you? You made

a perfect goose of yourself when he followed us into the carriage, do you know?’

‘Did I? Do you think Mr. Hotham saw it? I couldn’t help it, Margot. Seeing him again like that made me remember things. And I want to forget them—I thought I *had* forgotten!’

‘It is rather foolish, don’t you think, to feel so strongly about poor Camilla, after all these years? I know she treated you very badly in going away without a word as she did, but I don’t see that Mr. Melladew was so much to blame,’ said Margot, innocently enough. ‘Really, when I saw him sitting there, with that tail-between-the-legs expression, begging to be noticed, I was half-inclined to speak to him—perhaps it was better not.’

‘*Much* better!’ declared Ida. ‘I’m so glad you didn’t. If you had, I would not have stayed in the carriage. Wasn’t he looking fat and horrid?’ she added vindictively. ‘I wish I had not seen him—he quite spoilt my day!’

‘Something always does happen sooner or later to spoil a day when you come out expressly for pleasure,’ said Margot wearily; ‘however, this one is over, thank goodness!’

Orme and Hotham were walking back to their rooms through the hot streets now shuttered and silent.

Neither Guy nor Nugent was inclined for conversation. ‘We don’t seem particularly lively to-night,’ observed the younger man at length.

‘What is it you want to do?’ inquired Orme—‘dance home?’

‘I feel about as much like dancing as you do just now, I can tell you,’ remarked Guy gloomily. ‘I’ve had a beastly day.’

‘If it’s any comfort to you to know it,’ said Orme, with a short laugh, ‘so have I. But I should have thought *you* had no reason to complain, at all events.’

‘That’s all you know! Not that I had, till just at the end. We were getting on together like—like bricks, and then, all at once, something I said didn’t please her. I’m sure I don’t know why, I don’t remember saying anything she could take offence at—but she did; she turned perfectly silent, would hardly speak to me, let me see as plainly as possible that I was boring her—so at last I gave it up. It’s hard lines, Orme, I can tell you,’ continued Guy, with a suspicious break in his voice, ‘when you care for a girl as I do for Ida, to feel you—you only bore her!’

Orme laughed—it is wonderful how wretched one can be and yet laugh. ‘How can you possibly tell if she was bored? She probably had a headache or something; you don’t mean to say you’ve been constructing a tragedy out of that! My dear Guy, you must be desperately bent on being miserable!’

‘Then you don’t think—? But I don’t know, I’m not clever, Orme—you *are*, you know!’

‘Am I?’ said Orme bitterly. ‘I have been very clever to-day—I’ve done for myself with Miss Chevening!’

'I'm sorry, old chap,' said Hotham, with sufficient sympathy. 'Perhaps if—if you try your luck again later—don't you think?'

'It wasn't that—never mind what it was—but I shall never have the chance of trying my luck at all now.'

'Well, you know,' said Guy, with a mistaken attempt at consolation, 'between ourselves, she's a deuced pretty girl and all that—but I never took to her myself; I'm not sure you're not well out of it on the——'

Orme threw off his friend's arm. 'You mean well, I dare say,' he said grimly; 'but if you have any more comfort of that peculiar kind to offer me, I shall walk home on the other side of the street. If you *must* talk, talk of something you understand, for Heaven's sake!'

Guy whistled and walked on in silence, rather offended, though he ended by making allowances for his friend's state of mind. 'And, by gad!' he reflected, 'he may say what he likes—but I'm not so far wrong! I shouldn't like to marry that girl, I know; now *Ida*——'

And here he became reabsorbed in an attempt to convince himself that his self-distrust was after all without sufficient foundation. 'She wasn't bored *all* the time, any way!' he told himself, with reviving spirits.

CHAPTER VI.

IN A BALCONY.

On pardonne tant que l'on aime.—*La Rochefoucauld*.

THE Sunday which followed seemed to Orme the most miserable day he had ever spent in his life. He did not, as he had done on one or two occasions of late, accompany Guy to the fashionable church on the other side of the Park which Mrs. Chadwick and her daughters attended, nor did he appear at the 'Parade' afterwards. It was a fine hot June Sunday, the parks and main thoroughfares were crowded, but Orme carefully kept away from any places where there was any prospect of seeing Miss Chevening—he had good reason for his avoidance now, whatever had been the case before. Instead, he wandered, without caring where, down airless back streets where tired women sat listlessly behind their dusty window-panes, through decorous squares, and along roads alive with Sunday traffic, Salvationists, street preachers, Socialists, pleasure-seekers—all of whom he found himself regarding with a sick hatred. And ever at the bottom of his thoughts was the maddening recollection of yesterday; his speech—that priggish, self-righteous speech—never to be recalled—what red-hot twinges of impatient misery he felt at the memory of it! And Margot, as she defended herself,

would he never forget the strange loveliness of her pale indignant face as he had seen it there against the green and saffron sky? What an incredible fool he had been! Would it be of any use to write to her—to put before her all that the withdrawal of her friendship would mean to him? His worldly wisdom saved him from yielding to such an impulse as that. He must wait, that was all, until he met her again and knew whether her resentment was really incapable of being appeased. But it was this forced inaction, this sensation of utter powerlessness to do anything to help his own cause that was so tormenting. And so all that brilliant Sunday his mind revolved in the same dreary round, like a caged squirrel. Fortunately for him, this extreme dejection could not endure beyond that one day; with the morning came the distraction of his ordinary professional cares, to which even Miss Chevening and her just displeasure had temporarily to give place. And in a shorter time than he could have anticipated he had brought himself to a philosophical—though very far from cheerful—resignation. If he could not hope for her love—and that, he was now convinced, had never been anything but the wildest dream—did it matter so much that he must go without her friendship? What was her friendship for him but a mockery, if she could never give him more? He had only wrecked his chances of happiness a little prematurely—it must have come at some time.

All of which philosophy was of course instantly vanquished by a note which came to him from Mrs. Antrobus before many days had gone by. It was merely an invitation to an *impromptu* dinner—‘a very small party,’ apologies for short notice, and so forth. Should he go? There was more than a chance that that small party would turn out to include Miss Chevening. If so, she would assuredly find the means of settling all his doubts one way or the other. But if she proved implacable—what a protracted ordeal that dinner would be, to be close to her and meet only subdued hostility in her eyes—was it wise to submit himself to that? Wise or unwise, he would risk it—perhaps she would not be there after all: he discovered that Guy had received no invitation, which was some ground for inferring that Ida Chevening, at least, was not to be one of his aunt’s guests on that particular occasion. It was hardly likely that the elder sister had been asked alone—no, he might go in perfect security that he would not be called upon to endure the ordeal of meeting her that evening.

Having arrived at these conclusions, it was strange, perhaps, that his heart should beat so much more quickly than usual, and that he should have that curious sensation that was neither hope nor apprehension, but something compounded of both, as he was taken up in the lift to the floor in Albert Hall Mansions on which was Mrs. Antrobus’s flat.

He was a little before his time, which happened to be an earlier hour than usual, and he found his hostess alone when he entered the drawing-room. ‘That’s right,’ she said approvingly; ‘I like

my young men to be punctual. I hope you understand I have scarcely anyone to meet you? So difficult to get people at short notice just now! I've had two disappointments as it is.' (Orme was wondering whether Margot was one of them, and whether he was more glad or sorry.) 'Now I'll tell you who *are* coming. There's a Mrs. Maberly, she's a widow, and rather an invalid—and likes it. I met her abroad, she's a great traveller, I believe, never settles anywhere. Then there's her brother, a Mr. Langrish, he has some appointment in Japan—Yokohama, I think it is—but he's home on leave just now. According to his sister, he's everything that's delightful, though I confess I've not discovered it for myself as yet. Oh, and there's one other—Miss Chevening. I found out quite by accident that she was going to be all alone this evening, so I wrote off and secured her. Mr. Langrish is by way of being a great admirer of pretty faces,' said the old lady, as if this were a somewhat eccentric and unusual taste, 'and I thought I'd show him quite *the* loveliest person of my acquaintance. Don't you agree with me?—but I needn't ask you that. By the way, I quite thought you were all in the train somewhere that Saturday till we got to Paddington and I couldn't see you anywhere. I'd promised that girl solemnly she should be back in time for her party, and I was so flurried I couldn't think about anything else. But of course I didn't worry myself—I knew those two young ladies would be all right under your care, and I daresay,' she added, with a twinkle in her eye, 'that neither of you young men objected to waiting a little. But mind, I can't allow you to monopolise pretty Miss Margot to-night—do you hear?'

Orme smiled ruefully enough. He was thinking that there was small danger of that. But at least he would see her again. At any moment she might enter. He could picture exactly how she would come in with her small, stately head held well up, and her clear eyes shining—and presently she would see him, and what would she do then? There his second-sight was at fault, and indeed it seems sometimes as if Fate had the same dislike as a stammerer to being anticipated even in the most obvious conclusion, and will go out of her way to avoid accepting a hint. At all events that mental picture of Orme's, which it seemed so absolutely safe to draw, was not realised that evening. The electric bell sounded outside, and sent an absolutely superfluous thrill through him, for it proved to be only Mrs. Maberly and her brother who were announced. She was tall and drooping, with the mannered sweetness and plaintive languor of a person who wishes it understood that it is nothing but principle which keeps her from expiring. 'How do you *do*, dear Mrs. Antrobus?' she said mournfully. 'I quite despaired of coming to you—such a fatiguing morning; I've been positively fit for nothing ever since—I've been helping a friend to choose an umbrella!'

'My sister,' explained Mr. Langrish, 'attacks these problems in a conscientious spirit.'

'Oh, she begged me to go with her, poor thing!' said Mrs. Maberly; 'not that I was of much use—for they opened such hosts of them that I got quite confused at last.' Mr. Langrish was some years older than his sister, and looked about forty-five; like her, he had good features, but his faded eyes and the sardonic lines about his mouth gave Orme a disagreeable impression.

They stood there for some little time, exchanging the makeshift conversation that precedes the announcement of dinner, and gradually Orme began to have an ominous conviction that Margot was not coming. It was long past the hour, but she failed to make that entrance he had pictured, and at last the hostess lost patience. '*I was expecting somebody else,*' she said, as she rang the bell, 'but it's really no use waiting any longer—she won't come now! Something must have prevented her, or she forgot, or made a mistake in the day—it's really very naughty of her.'

Mr. Langrish seemed indifferent on the subject so long as dinner was not to be delayed, but Orme took Mrs. Maberly in with a heavy heart. She would not come. Mrs. Antrobus's acceptance of the fact seemed to have made it final, and he thought he knew why Miss Chevening preferred to break her engagement—she had found out or suspected that he was to be there! So he crumbled the bread of affliction as he sat there, opposite the empty chair where she should have been, and soup, fish, and wine had all the same tastelessness.

And then suddenly the bell rang at last; he tried to keep down the rising hope—it was the servant with the note of apology—and yet no, it was no manservant's voice he heard in the anteroom. 'Why, there she is after all!' cried Mrs. Antrobus, and rose to upbraid and bring in the delinquent. And then Margot's clear voice could be heard—she had mistaken the hour, that was the very commonplace explanation of what his egotism had construed as fatal. Angry or indifferent—what mattered now she had come? And presently Miss Chevening entered, looking meeker under the sense of wrongdoing, but with her usual air of pretty composure. 'And you and Mr. Orme already know one another,' Mrs. Antrobus had added, after mentioning the names of the other guests. 'We have—met before,' she had replied, with a smile which told him nothing, though, as he might have known, she was not likely to betray her feelings in any conspicuous manner just then.

She seemed to have brought new life and animation into the party, which had decidedly been in need of some stimulus. Mr. Langrish's pale eyes lighted up, and he exerted himself as her neighbour to be worthy of his unexpected good luck. He could be amusing in his cool, cynical way when he thought it worth the trouble, as he evidently did now, and Miss Chevening was willing to be pleased.

Orme observed her furtively as she sat opposite; she was wearing black that evening, some soft gauzy material with half sleeves of delicate lace; there was a spray of scarlet flowers at her

breast, a small diamond star scintillated in her hair, as she turned her head to listen to Langrish's somewhat acrid pleasantries.

Once more Orme could look upon her and admire and love her with a love that had no tormenting misgivings—but it was too late; he had wronged her past all hope of forgiveness, and it was a greater distance that separated them now than that daintily arranged table.

With so small a party the conversation was necessarily more or less general, and she could hardly have avoided speaking to him from time to time without making it obvious. And as she clearly had no intention of this, he had to bear his part—to reply to the careless remarks she made to him, and address her on occasions, without betraying to anyone but her that he was not misled by the unreality of it all.

For of course he knew that she had not forgotten, even if it suited her to appear to do so for the present; she would show him how far she was from forgetting when her opportunity came, unless she intended to adopt this indifferent treatment of him always in the future.

That he would *not* endure—it would be too maddening; it should be either all or nothing—he would tell her so and leave it to her to decide.

All this was passing in his mind while he was listening to Mrs. Maberly, who was confiding to him her difficulties in engaging suitable companions. 'I must have a cheerful person about me,' she was saying mournfully; 'I am so fond of cheerfulness, and that is such a rare thing in these days. It's quite delightful to me to meet anyone fresh and bright—like your opposite neighbour, for instance,' she went on, lowering her voice—'and such a lovely face, too! I don't suppose she has ever known what care and suffering are, and it's so good for one to come across young people like that now and then. I'm so glad for my brother to have seen her—I assure you I can scarcely believe he's the same person!—But I was telling you about companions: you wouldn't believe what trouble I've had with them! I always make a point of engaging some one in—in one's own position in life, you know, and treating her as a personal friend; but they are so tiresome, always fancying themselves slighted or something ridiculous of the sort, and in travelling they're worse than useless; the last one I had expected *me* to take the tickets, and keep the seats, and do everything. And when we were at Homburg, if I met any friends I knew and she was with me, she never thought of walking on, she would hang about, and then sulk because I didn't introduce her! I suppose you don't happen to know any nice cheerful girl who is willing to go out as a companion? My present companion mopes all day long, and I really can *not* bear it, my nerves are not strong enough—as I said before, cheerfulness is absolutely a necessity to me!'

Orme had to confess his inability to recommend any candidate

for what he privately thought might prove a somewhat exacting post, and so Mrs. Maberly meandered on in a description of her Continental wanderings, from which it appeared that she had been at the point of death at every health resort in Europe, and had been carried insensible through all the finest scenery.

He had only to listen and commiserate at the proper moments, while at the same time not one of Margot's words or gestures escaped him, as she talked to Langrish and Mrs. Antrobus, with a gaiety that seemed spontaneous enough and was certainly charming.

The ladies rose, and Orme and Langrish were left to improve their acquaintance.

'As we've got leave to smoke,' said Langrish, 'I'm going to take Mrs. Antrobus at her word, and have a cigarette. Worst of women's dinners is, they will *not* keep cigars—though perhaps that's just as well. If they gave you one it would be sure to be the sort of brand you get for knocking down a cocoa-nut! It's something to be allowed to smoke at all. You *do* smoke? Try one of these. You won't be tempted, eh? Just as you please—I shall.'

Orme declined, though he was very far from despising that solace at other times; a cigarette is not a very crushing obligation, and yet he did not wish to be indebted, even to this trifling extent, to this man. Besides, he felt that Miss Chevening's fastidiousness might lead her to question the sincerity of a penitence flavoured with recent tobacco.

'I suppose,' said Langrish, lazily adapting himself to his chair, 'you come here pretty often, eh?'

'I have only known Mrs. Antrobus a few months,' said Orme. 'I have dined here before, yes.'

'And, if I heard rightly, this is not the first time you've met that extremely charming young lady who seems to have somewhat vague notions of time.'

'No, it's not,' Orme said, feeling unreasonably averse to hearing Margot discussed by this sallow and *blasé* stranger.

'I've been away from England so long, I'm out of it all. Who is the lady?—for as usual I didn't succeed in catching her name.'

Orme informed him shortly. 'And I suppose she's one of the great catches this season—an heiress, and so on.'

'I've no reason to believe so—but I really know nothing about it.'

'Heiress or no heiress, she won't be allowed to remain Miss Chevening long with that face, I should say.' He was watching Orme's face narrowly as he made this supposition with an overdone carelessness.

'Most probably not,' Orme agreed, in no very encouraging tone.

'Ah,' said Langrish, with a certain air of relief, 'you feel no interest in the question, or you wouldn't speak like that. When a man comes to my age,' and he gave an awkward little laugh which seemed to invite a protest, 'he finds himself a looker-on by ne-

cessity as well as choice. I used to hold, as very likely you do now, that no woman was worth sacrificing one's liberty for. I don't say I was wrong now, and yet if I had had the luck to meet—well, a girl like this Miss What's-her-name, when I was younger, I fancy I should have been tempted to alter my opinion. I don't know—any way, it's too late to speculate about it now. It's some fellow of her own generation that she's destined to make happy—or eternally miserable, as the case may be—and she looks as if she was capable of doing both, probably has done both already more than once! It would be interesting to follow the career of a girl like that as a dispassionate observer, and see what she makes of it. I pity the man who marries her without mastering her—she'd lead him a dog's life; and yet, after all, I dare say she would be kind to her dog if he behaved himself!

He was meditating aloud as he regarded his half-smoked cigarette with lack-lustre eyes. When a professed cynic does indulge in sentiment, he seldom does it by halves, and Langrish was at once a pathetic as well as a slightly absurd spectacle in his evident inability to conceal the impression Miss Chevening had made upon his experienced heart. Whether it was fellow-feeling or a consciousness that, desperate as his own case was, his companion's was even more hopeless, Orme found himself disliking him less, though he did not allow himself on that account to be drawn into any speculations concerning Miss Chevening's future.

And soon, after a few desultory remarks on other subjects, Langrish threw down his cigarette, and, much to Orme's relief, proposed that they should go into the drawing-room.

The last flush of sunset had died out as they sat at table, and the lamps were being lighted as they came in. Both men's eyes explored the shadows beyond in search of the same figure, and both faces fell the next moment—there was no Miss Chevening there. Orme felt that his ill-luck had pursued him; she had gone on to some other party no doubt, perhaps she had even invented another engagement; she must have slipped away while Langrish was discussing her over that eternal cigarette of his!

'Oswald, dear,' said Mrs. Maberly, 'come here a moment—I want you. I've been having such a long talk with that Miss Chevening, and she tells me'—the name had the effect of rousing Langrish to an ultra-fraternal promptness of attention; the next best thing to talking to his late neighbour was hearing all about her, which he settled himself to do accordingly.

Mrs. Antrobus came up to Orme, who made a really gallant effort to appear as if he was unconscious that anyone was missing.

'It won't do!' she said; 'I know whom you are looking round for—now; don't protest in that hypocritical manner; you're thinking what a silly old woman I must be to let my pretty guest run away at the beginning of the evening. It's hard on you, I must say, because you were really very good at dinner. I noticed. And now you shall have your reward. Will you take this shawl and ask

Miss Chevening to be good enough to put it on—to please me? If you step through that window on to the balcony, you will find her there. Don't trouble to entertain me, I've my other guests to look after—get away with you.'

She dismissed him with a nod full of good-humoured intelligence, though she really knew nothing of the real case. She had been told by her nephew that Orme was an admirer of Miss Chevening; she liked them both, and liked match-making even better, so, as she could afford to be unworldly in other people's affairs, she had made up her mind that the young man should have his chance at all events, though she was completely in the dark as to Margot's own sentiments.

Whatever came of it, Mrs. Antrobus would have something romantic to think of, and it would be particularly interesting if the affair should be settled, in either sense, on her own balcony. How Margot's mother might regard such an engagement—supposing that were to be the result—was not a matter which gave Mrs. Antrobus any concern whatever. Mrs. Chadwick was doing her best to secure Guy for her younger daughter, and, though the old lady had rather helped than hindered this end it was because she had been talked over by her nephew, and not because she regarded Ida as an ideal match for him in any respect. So she felt the more at liberty to treat any projects the mother might have for Margot with indifference.

And thus it came about that Nugent was, after all, afforded the opportunity he sought—though with a very different object from that his hostess attributed to him, for he stepped out upon the balcony, knowing well that a lover's character would be the very last in which Miss Chevening would tolerate him, and determined to force her to declare the scorn and hatred she must be feeling.

She was sitting at an angle of the balcony, looking down upon a spectacle that had not had time as yet to lose the attraction of novelty. It was the year of one of the most popular and successful of the short-lived series of Exhibitions that formed the delight of all Londoners who were not inhabitants of South Kensington. The Metropolis was just discovering, with a pleased surprise, that it was as capable as others of enjoying itself in the open air, and the summer, for once, permitted this to be demonstrated night after night with impunity.

On a lovely evening such as this was, the scene, from a height at which its least pleasing features were blurred or lost, had a strange and almost magical beauty. Immediately below was the great conservatory, filled with mild pearly radiance and outlined without in points of ruddier flame; coloured stars twinkled amidst the dusky foliage of the poplars and plane-trees; painted lanterns swayed, like strings of Aladdin's jewels, in the night air; behind the black trees, a column of sparkling water shot up, changing hue every instant in the ray of electric light which travelled at times over a portion of the vast Hall hard by, bringing its decorated frieze

and the ridged glass of its dome into startling prominence. And from below, as an undercurrent to the strains of dance-music from the kiosks, came up the confused tramping stir of humanity, that densely packed mass of black and grey, which from the incessant pipe-lighting, resembled burning tinder. Over it all, against a warm greenish sky, the moon hung in a mellow haze, serenely unconscious of its scientific substitute—the monster electric light that poured down crude insistent beams from its ugly iron mast. Viewed at close quarters, the gathering was commonplace and vulgar enough, no doubt, but at a distance only very superior persons would deny its picturesque effect.

Not that Margot was thinking of that at the moment, though the view from the balcony had been her avowed motive of coming out. She wanted to be alone and think, and the subject of her reflections was Nugent Orme. She was angry with him—of course she was angry with him—for daring to speak as he did; she did not want to forgive him just yet—but something in his manner during that dinner had given her a new uneasiness. What if he had changed his mind once more?—what if he no longer wanted to be forgiven? She had been observing him, even when she seemed most attentive to her neighbour's remarks, and she had seen no signs of anxiety or penitence; he had answered her no further than was inevitable when she spoke, but quite freely and naturally, as if he were alike indifferent whether she was gracious or not, and towards the end there had been something stern and determined in the way in which he had concentrated his whole attention on Mrs. Maberly. The idea that he—her friend, the one man she knew whose opinion she respected—was content to drift away from her for good and all was insupportable, and yet, if he did not come to seek her now, she would know that this was so—he had reconsidered, and he condemned her!

And then, as she was trying to make herself accept this, she became aware that some one had come out upon the balcony—she would not look round, lest it should not be he. It was Nugent—at least he was not indifferent, then! Though she would not let him see the satisfaction she felt, perhaps she was perverse enough to feel a revival of her original displeasure.

‘Is it you?’ she exclaimed, with an accent of cool surprise.

‘I was sent by Mrs. Antrobus,’ he exclaimed. ‘She wished you to put on this.’

He had not come of his own accord, then—he had been sent! ‘I detest shawls!’ she said petulantly. ‘I mean, it is very kind of Mrs. Antrobus, but I am perfectly warm here.’

‘Then I am to take it back?’ Immediately after saying this he regretted it, but it was too late.

‘If you will.’

For a moment Orme was tempted to take her at her word and go, but he could not leave her until he had said what was in his mind.

'I will take it back presently,' he said, 'not now.'

'Why not?—I thought that was what you came for.'

'It was not all I came for—I came to say something to you.'

Her heart sank at his tone. 'I don't want to hear,' she said faintly.

'I will be as short as I can, but you must hear me. When we last met, I asked you to give me some assurance that I might still consider myself your friend. You refused to answer me at the time, you remember?'

'Yes,' she said. 'Well?'

'It is unnecessary now,' he continued. 'I know that any real friendship between us is impossible. I will save you the trouble of saying so yourself. And I am not content, if you are, to go through the mockery of friendship you chose to adopt this evening. I dare say it was at least as disagreeable to you—very likely you thought it best under the circumstances; I only know that I will never, if I can help it, put you to such a necessity again. I would rather that you cut me whenever we met than suffer again as I have to-night! Anything is better than keeping up a form that is dead—I ask you to spare me that punishment in future.'

He spoke wildly, unreasonably, hardly knowing what he wanted or meaning what he said, in his despairing impatience to anticipate the worst. Margot sat silent, looking down with unseeing eyes on the lights and the moving throng below. At last she said in a strangely subdued and even anxious way, 'When you say our friendship is dead, impossible—is it because of anything *I* have done?'

'Did you not make it clear enough just now that you could not forgive me?'

'And you were not thinking about—about Allen when you said that?'

'Allen!—what is Allen to me now, except that—Is it possible,' he cried, 'that I have not offended you beyond all hope?—can you honestly, freely, forgive me?'

'I was angry that you should believe I was quite so bad as that,' she said in a low voice; 'but I think I was even more hurt—you were so severe, you did not even wait to hear my version!'

'I know,' he said remorsefully. 'Do you think I don't hate myself for it all? I was blind to believe that you could possibly be capable of cruelty.'

She looked at him with great serious eyes. 'But if I *was* cruel, a little cruel?' she said.

'What you did was not cruel—justice is not cruelty—and you acted, as far as you could tell then, for the best for all—even for him. No, you are right to be angry; right, even if you can't bring yourself to pardon me. It was a monstrous charge to think of bringing against you, and yet I brought it. But somehow I ask you now, though I did not dare a few minutes ago, to have more

charity than I showed—to believe how deeply ashamed I feel of having wronged you, and forgive me.'

'Forgive you?' she repeated softly; 'and some day you will say the same things to me again—is it worth while?'

'Now you are really cruel!' he exclaimed.

She rose and stood there facing him, with eyes half resentful, half reproachful. 'But it is true,' she said. 'You can't change your nature all at once. Have I ever done right in your eyes since we first knew one another? You have always found fault and scolded me for what I did or did not do. When you said nothing I knew you were disapproving of me still. Is that friendship? Ought not one's friends to be a little blind to one's faults, to—to believe in one a little—even though one may do wrong things? I think so.'

He could not answer for the moment; she looked so fair and spirited and innocent, her loveliness gaining a mysterious glamour in the strange glow of reflected light that reached the balcony where they two were alone, high above and apart from the ordinary world. A dreamy waltz refrain floated up to the balcony, filling up the pause.

'No,' she continued, in a tone of conviction that was touched with sadness; 'you don't really believe in me—you never will!'

Then he found words—words that came from him in spite of himself, and that he had not thought of uttering till that instant. 'I not believe in you!' he cried; 'is it possible that you think that—that you have not guessed—not seen? You won't trust me even as a friend, and yet—I must say it now, though you will send me away when I have done—it is more than that I would be if I could! Margot, I love you. I know it is mad—worse than mad—to tell you so now, but I must. I must! . . . I will not have you unjust to me!'

He caught the fair hand which rested on the balcony and which she did not withdraw, even though he was hurting it unconsciously in the energy of his strong grasp.

'Speak to me!' he pleaded eagerly. 'You are not angry! Tell me you are not angry!'

She turned her face to him again; her eyes were very bright, and a tremulous smile played about her lips. 'I—I don't think I am angry,' she said slowly.

Even then he could not understand that this great happiness could really be his. 'Margot—tell me,' he said, 'is it true—you don't hate me?'

'I never hated you,' she replied, almost in a whisper.

'But do you love me? Enough to be my wife?'

She let him draw her towards him till her proud head was nestling against his shoulder. 'If you care to take me,' she said with a little low laugh full of content—and he understood at last.

Neither had spoken for some little time: he was still wondering if this were not a dream. 'How pretty it all looks down there,

doesn't it?' said Margot at last (when she first came out she had found it all garish and bustling). 'I wonder if there are people in that crowd as happy as we are! Somehow I feel as if it was a good omen, having all that brightness about us.'

While she spoke the scene suddenly changed, the lights died out everywhere, leaving the glass halls grey and cold and the trees mere shadowy masses of black; a great bell began to clang harshly; shrieks and screams and boisterous calls came up from the crowd of pleasure-seekers as they hustled towards the exits.

Margot gave a little shiver. 'I wish they had not done that just then!' she said. 'How foolish of me to mind! Only, Nugent, I want you to promise me something. I know I am not good—(no, don't interrupt, I know best)—only *promise* not to think horrid things of me again—be satisfied with me as I am!'

'I shall not promise,' he said, 'because there is no need for it now. If I did not know it before, I know now that you are far too lovely and good for a poor fellow like me!'

She smiled. 'If you will only think so always. And now, hadn't we better take Mrs. Antrobus's shawl back? I shall like Indian shawls after to-night.'

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. ANTROBUS AS A DIPLOMATIST.

EVEN Margot felt a little diffidence in facing those three pair of eyes in the drawing-room, after the change in her life that had taken place during the short absence on the balcony. There was nothing awkward or self-conscious in her manner, however, as she came in, though, to an observer of any penetration, the glory of sudden happiness which had not had time to fade out of her eyes, and the dreamy gentleness of her smile, would have told a tale. In Orme's bearing, as he followed, the position of affairs was less poetically perceptible; the least demonstrative of men can scarcely disguise the fact of being a recently accepted lover, and avoid a certain indescribable air of shamefaced triumph; if he does, he is apt to err on the side of an unconsciousness fatally overdone.

One glance was sufficient for Mrs. Antrobus, though she contented herself with saying, 'So you haven't rejected the shawl, my dear? I hoped Mr. Orme would succeed in persuading you.'

'He did,' replied Margot demurely. 'Thank you so much for sending it out to me.'

Mrs. Maberly, who would hardly have noticed anything, if it had all occurred under her very eyes, remarked upon the protection an Indian shawl was, and the danger of trusting oneself at any season on a balcony without one. 'Ah, well,' said Mrs. Antrobus, 'I hope that, thanks to my foresight, Miss Chevening will not regret having trusted herself on *my* balcony.'

Private reasons made Langrish keener of sight than his sister; after such a brilliant beginning, his evening, poor man, had had a dismal ending. He had been in torments for the last three-quarters of an hour, and it is to be feared his hostess was not incapable of enjoying his sufferings. Too late, he had discovered that Miss Chevening had not left after all; she was outside—and that young fellow with the square saturnine face was boring her with his conversation. The ingenious arts he used to induce Mrs. Antrobus to brave the night air, his perseverance in speaking of the view there must be from her windows, his industriously laboured allusions to the Exhibition, were almost pathetic—but the old lady proved incredibly dull of comprehension. She sat like a rock, and gave him no excuse for leaving his seat for a moment, while his sister, who might have helped him, was too indolent and too much afraid of neuralgia to second his manœuvres. And now, though he did not guess the truth, he did begin to have a dim suspicion that this reserved young barrister fellow might possibly not be such a determined misogamist. He did his best to make up for lost time by enjoying what he could of Miss Chevening's conversation, and he found her more charming and delightful than ever, more disposed to agree with him, easier to amuse. There was a new sweetness in her smile, an added sparkle in her eyes, which, when his sister signified an untimely desire to go, sent the poor man away with a dull pain in a heart that had been long a stranger to such symptoms, and a wonder whether, after all, women were particular about a man's age.

Mrs. Maberly had been pouring out her sorrows to Margot, to whom she had taken a languid fancy, much in the same strain as Nugent had been treated to at dinner; she left her with an urgent invitation to come and see her at the Langham, where she would be until she went abroad in August, an invitation, however, of which Margot had the smallest possible intention of availing herself.

'You are not going to desert me too?' said Mrs. Antrobus to Margot, who was holding out her hand in farewell. 'I was hoping for a little chat, now those tiresome people are gone.'

But Margot had an intuition of what the old lady was dying to hear, and not even gratitude could bring her to talk of it so soon. 'Another day,' she murmured with a pretty, caressing, pleading gesture; 'my maid must be waiting. I promised not to be late—*please* let me go now.'

'Very well,' was the reply. 'I dare say Mr. Orme will see you to your carriage.'

In the anteroom was Susan, on a chair, with that pleasing air

of undeserved martyrdom which she was wont to adopt on such occasions. Orme noticed that her mistress's gracious friendliness had absolutely no effect upon the girl. As they went down the stairs (for he did not feel called upon to suggest the lift), Susan following, he whispered, 'Shall I see you to-morrow when I come to speak to Mrs. Chadwick?'

Margot started. 'We shall have to tell mother!' she said (how dear the 'we' was to him). 'I—I had forgotten that—and what will she say?'

Orme himself had a very uncomfortable prevision of what Mrs. Chadwick would say.

'Whatever she says,' he replied, 'promise me, Margot, you won't let yourself be talked into—into giving me up.'

'You want me to promise that?' she said in a hurt tone. 'Already! I told you you didn't believe in me. Whatever I am—I can be true—Nugent.'

'I do believe in you, darling,' he said passionately. 'I am afraid of nothing your mother can do—we shall be happy some day, in spite of her.'

'I thought we were happy now,' she answered softly, and Orme accepted the rebuke, not without a passing irritation at the remembrance of the presence of Susan a few steps behind; he thought she might have had the sense to go down by the lift!

As it was, he had to control his rapture, and put Margot and her maid into the hansom, with as matter-of-fact an air as he could assume, though he did not succeed, even thus, in disarming Miss Susan's suspicions.

'To-morrow!' she repeated to herself as they drove away—'and what is there about to-morrow so particular that he should look like that? Ah, you deceiving cat! I can see you a-smiling to yourself in the corner there. I know what's up between you and him—and a deal too good he is for a heartless piece like you. But, if I know missis, you'll smile the other side of your face to-morrow, and I shan't be sorry for one!'

'I 'ope you've 'ad a pleasant evenin', miss?' she said aloud.

Margot came out of her reverie. 'Did you speak, Susan? Oh, thank you—yes, it was pleasant,' she said gently, without any of the *hauteur* which she could not always repress in speaking to Susan, her dislike to whom she tried in vain to overcome. The girl had given no cause for complaint since she had been with them; she was not unkind to Lettice, she was a clever and attentive maid, but it was always an effort to Margot, until that evening, to submit to her services; she had a constant sense that she would be impertinent if she dared.

To-night, however, Miss Chevening was in charity with all the world.

What were Orme's thoughts as he walked home alone under the stars? His heart was full of a passion of wondering gratitude—a happiness so intense as to terrify him into some approach to

soberness, with that odd but universal impression that it is not safe to be so happy. She loved him—after all, in spite of all! How strange and far away now seemed all the hopes and fears with which he had gone to that dinner, with only a suspicion that she might be there! And how little could he have hoped for this!—a reconciliation, a half-hearted readmittance to friendship, had seemed an impossible piece of good-fortune then. How wonderful it all was! How he loved even his past misery for the sake of its sequel! He knew Margot so little still—but he felt now that there were no discoveries in her nature that could make her less lovable in his eyes. She was perfect, more perfect for her very imperfections, which he had once in his folly and presumption so grossly exaggerated. When he thought now that he had been suspecting her of an act of cold-blooded cruelty—But why should he think of it? she had explained everything—there was an implied disloyalty in the very recollection of it.

Was there another motive beneath this resolve to forget? had he a secret disinclination to examine her denial too closely—an uneasy fear of the doubts which might, for all he could tell, be in a state of suspended animation?

If he had, he was not aware of it; he had done with doubt for ever; he believed in her implicitly, in her essential womanliness and sweetness, her truthfulness and candour; to that faith he would cling—for what remained for him now if he lost hold for an instant?

There was no conscious effort in this belief; but, if it is true that a really robust faith shrinks from no inquiry, dreads no self-questioning, then Orme's belief in Margot fell short of the standard of perfect soundness, passionately as—had it been suggested to him—he would have denied the imputation.

Early the next afternoon Mrs. Antrobus received a visit from Mrs. Chadwick; she came alone, and her expression as she sat down showed that she considered herself an aggrieved person. 'No,' she said, in reply to the conventional inquiries, 'I am *not* well—how could I be, after such a shock as I received last night?'

'Dear me! not a carriage accident, I hope?' said Mrs. Antrobus. 'London coachmen are so shockingly intemperate! I remember having to discharge one because he drew up solemnly at eleven o'clock at night at the Marble Arch, which he insisted was my front door.'

'My coachman is a blue-ribbonist,' returned Mrs. Chadwick stiffly, 'and I have had no accident of that kind—I wish it had been no worse than that. The shock came from my eldest daughter, who came into my room the moment I got home last night, and told me something which grieved and surprised me more than I can say. It seems that Mr. Orme took advantage of meeting her under your protection to—actually to propose to her, and, what is

worse, I fear, from all I can gather, that she did not discourage him as unmistakably as she ought to have done!’

‘That sounds very shocking and immoral,’ said Mrs. Antrobus, ‘at least, if, as I suppose, Miss Margot happens to be already engaged to somebody else?’

Mrs. Chadwick was in a state of polite fury at not being able to make the old lady understand her feelings. ‘Surely,’ she said sharply, ‘it is bad enough as it is, without any complications of that kind! My daughter has had more than one exceptionally good offer, down at Gorsecombe and since we came to town, but she has persistently refused to listen to one of them.’

‘Then I fail to see why she should not listen to my young friend, if she likes him.’

‘Oh, you *must* see—I’m sure you *do* see in your own heart!—a young man like this Mr. Orme—the son of the vicar in our own village at home——’

‘Hoity-toity!’ was the expression Mrs. Antrobus would have liked to use just then, only one cannot say ‘hoity-toity’ without some infringement of the strict etiquette of afternoon calls. So she said instead, ‘I was not aware that to be the son of even a country vicar is to be outside the pale of society.’

‘It is not a question of the pale of society at all. Mr. Orme, the father, is an excellent man and much respected in the parish. As far as I know, his son is a worthy young man enough, but not a match for my daughter Margot; with her beauty and the opportunities I am now in a position to give her, she might marry anybody!’

‘Then why not Mr. Orme?—but I understand you. And yet, for the life of me, my dear, I don’t know in what his inferiority consists—if you’ll pardon my plain-speaking. A man can but be a gentleman, and you’ll hardly deny that he is that, while your pretty Margot, charming as she is (and no one can admire her more than I do), is a colonel’s daughter. Where is the glaring inequality?’

‘Where?’ exclaimed Mrs. Chadwick; ‘you must have very extraordinary views to ask such a question. In his means, in his prospects, in the position he could give her!’

‘Of course—*now* I understand. Your daughters are heiresses,’ said Mrs. Antrobus, perfectly aware they were nothing of the kind.

‘I did not say so,’ retorted Mrs. Chadwick; ‘they have nothing of their own, poor girls, though I have no doubt that, provided they made suitable matches, their step-father would behave generously towards them.’

‘Then we come back in a circle again,’ persisted the old lady; ‘why isn’t Mr. Orme a suitable match? He’s a gentleman, as we both agree, clever, good-looking enough, though he isn’t a beauty-man—for which you may thank the Lord. As to his means, I’ve taken the trouble to make inquiries, and I can assure you that he is making a fine income already for a young man of his standing,

and, from all I can hear, he's likely to be rich and famous enough to satisfy any reasonable ambition in a few years. Upon my word, I don't know what more you want. Is it so easy to make a really brilliant match for a girl who has nothing but good looks and good birth and breeding? Young men are shy enough of marriage in any case in *my* experience. I must say that, if you take my advice, you will be satisfied with things as they are—I'm sure they might be very much worse.'

'It is so easy to talk in that way!' said Mrs. Chadwick; 'but you are not a mother—you don't see things with a mother's eyes! If you did, I think—yes,' she added, unable to restrain her sense of injury, 'I *do* think you would have been more careful, you would not have allowed things to go on without so much as warning me. I am not reproaching you, dear Mrs. Antrobus—but I *must* feel that you have not been quite—quite considerate to me!'

'Well, I'm not going to defend myself there—I *did* allow it to go on. I'm a sentimental old woman, though you wouldn't think it, to look at me, and I hold that the only true marriages are those of affection. I'd rather see a girl I was fond of in her grave than married to a man for his title or his money. But that's my eccentricity; and, after all, you have not told me what you mean to do in this case. As one who takes a decided interest in both parties, I think I've some right to be informed. I suppose you have seen Mr. Orme?'

'No, indeed,' said Mrs. Chadwick, drawing herself up; 'he called to see me this morning at such a ridiculously early hour—nearly eleven—that it was quite impossible to receive him.'

'So you told him to call again, like a tradesman—very civil treatment, I must say, considering that he probably had to make some sacrifice to call at all just then; but I suppose you will condescend to see him some time, and what will you say to him when you do see him?'

'What *can* I say? I shall tell him that it is out of the question, utterly out of the question—that I can't hear of any sort of an engagement between them—that I trust to him as a gentleman to give up all idea of it.'

'Very pretty! Poor Mr. Orme! he has not lost much by not seeing you this morning, it seems. But now, my dear Mrs. Chadwick, before you quite make up your mind, suppose you listen to me for a little. I don't think you were at all unwilling to let your daughters come to me whenever I asked them. And I fancy you must have had some suspicion that my nephew Guy was, shall we say, attracted by your daughter Ida?'

'If you mean—!' began Mrs. Chadwick, flushing angrily.

'Of course I don't—but listen. I have done what I could to encourage it, to give Ida an opportunity of seeing if she cares for Guy, who is a dear good fellow, and deserves to be happy. I think that, through me, they have met at more places this season than they could have done if I had not chosen to interfere. I don't

know, by the way, how far you approve of my proceedings in that respect ?'

'How can you ask !' cried her visitor. 'We are all fond of Guy, and, though I should not dream of dictating to a daughter of mine, and, of course, I don't know what dear Ida's feelings for him may be——'

'Exactly,' interrupted the old lady unceremoniously, 'you would offer no obstacles ; you are fond of Guy, and Guy will have Hawleigh some day, and Ida may be Lady Hotham. Well, I see no particular objection to all that, if it happens. I'm peculiar, as I said, and though Guy is my nephew, I'd rather see him settled and happy with a nice girl he was fond of, even if he never got a penny with her, than turning into a mere man about town—a selfish, extravagant rake, who believes in nothing, and cares for nobody but his precious self.'

'Oh, so would I !' put in Mrs. Chadwick emotionally—'far, far rather !'

'We are two such unworldly people, you see ; but you mustn't be offended by what I'm going to say : You might offer no obstacles, but I'm afraid you would find that they would be less reasonable at Hawleigh. My sister-in-law has an idea that Guy ought to make a very good marriage indeed. I'm afraid that even a commoner's daughter, unless she was extremely rich, would hardly satisfy her—Oh, of course it's very ridiculous and narrow-minded and all that sort of thing, but some mothers *are* like that, my dear Mrs. Chadwick, and we must be prepared for it.'

Mrs. Chadwick sighed and said she found it difficult to believe that any mother would oppose the happiness of her own child from mere ambition.

'Ah, but it is so, I assure you ; Lady Adela would look at it very much as you look at Mr. Orme's proposal. But, as to "opposing a son's happiness," why, she would tell herself that Guy was too young to know his own mind, that he would soon get over the disappointment, as very likely he would, for even now I am by no means certain it's more than a passing fancy, or that, without constant opportunities of meeting, it would ever come to anything serious. Well, she would say all that—and, what's more, she would reproach me bitterly for allowing and encouraging it. I dare say I should survive it ; and I've some influence with my brother, and even my sister-in-law would not care to quarrel with me—she didn't make me Guy's godmother for nothing. So in time I should get my way, I don't doubt ; but, to tell you the truth, I am cured of interfering in other people's concerns.'

'You will not ? Oh, my dear Mrs. Antrobus, why do you say so ?'

'Because I am unlucky. Aren't you here now to reproach me, because I don't look at marriages with a mother's eyes ? I had no business to interfere, and that's the truth of it. I give up Mr. Orme ; send him away if you like—you won't offend me, or, I dare

say, break naughty Margot's heart past mending. Only, I must be consistent; if it's impertinent to interfere in one case, it's as bad in the other. I shall keep on the safe side in future, and give my dear sister-in-law a hint that a trip round the world would do Master Guy no harm. I think he'd go, too.'

'I'm sure,' said Mrs. Chadwick with stateliness, 'that you know me too well to think I am a designing or—or a harsh mother with my daughters; I only want to do the best for them I can. And what you tell me about Mr. Orme *does* make a difference. I'd no idea you took so much interest in him, and he really is nice—I always felt that about him.'

'Does that mean that you can put up with him as a son-in-law after all?'

Mrs. Chadwick saw no way out of it; an engagement was highly undesirable, but still there need be no question of marriage for some time yet—it was not as if it was necessarily final. And she could not afford to quarrel with Mrs. Antrobus, for she knew very well that, devoted as Guy seemed to be, he was by no means secure at present, and, without his aunt's countenance, might easily slip through their fingers altogether.

So she said, with a very creditable show of cordiality, 'How can you talk of it in such a way? Of course I shall be delighted, though I may not be altogether pleased, in some respects, to welcome Mr. Orme as one of the family. One thing I must stipulate for—they must not think of marrying at present.'

'They can both wait a little while for that,' said Mrs. Antrobus. 'Well, I'm very glad you take so sensible a view of it, my dear. But I was sure you would.'

'And about dear Guy—for he is really such a favourite of mine!'—began Mrs. Chadwick, as she was rising to go.

'A greater favourite than even Mr. Orme?' put in the old lady grimly. 'Well, what about dear Guy?'

'I was only going to say—I *don't* think a trip round the world would be—would be very——'

'Don't you? no more do I, my dear; make your mind easy—he isn't going—he shall stay and make love to little Miss Ida to both their hearts' content.'

And, comforted by that assurance, Mrs. Chadwick was able to take her departure, leaving Guy's affectionate aunt to enjoy the success of her diplomacy.

CHAPTER VIII.

AUTUMN MANŒUVRES.

Wait a little, wait a little,
You shall fix a day.—*The Window.*

ON his second visit Orme found a more gracious reception than his first abortive attempt to ask Mrs. Chadwick's consent had led him to hope for. She was not particularly cordial even then—there was a resignation in her manner that was scarcely flattering, but she did not oppose an engagement, provided that there should be no mention of marriage at present. Nugent, not having contemplated an immediate marriage, was perfectly content to accept the proviso; it was happiness enough for him to see his love from time to time and enjoy all the privileges of an accepted lover. Margot either was or pretended to be disappointed at so matter-of-fact an ending. 'I thought from mother's manner last night that it was going to be much more exciting than this,' she said playfully; 'all my determination not to give way is quite wasted! I had made up my mind to encounter every kind of opposition, and to prove to you how constant I could be—and now—well, you must admit it is a little tame, Nugent.'

'I can do without the excitement,' he said; 'I can't do without you.'

She shook her head. 'You won't appreciate my society nearly so much now you can have it every day—you will soon begin to disapprove of me again.'

'Margot, you don't really believe that? Won't you ever understand what you are to me?'

'I do think you are fond of me,' she said; 'you think me so much better than I am or ever can be. I believe I am just a little afraid of what you will feel when—when you begin to find me out.'

'Afraid of me!' he cried.

'There are very few people I have ever been afraid of,' she said, 'but I think I might be of you. If you were really angry you would be very severe. After all,' she added, 'I am not sure that that is not one of the things I like best in you, only you must try not to be too severe with me, Nugent. Make up your mind now to be disappointed a little—I wish you would.'

Nugent's protest was practical rather than argumentative, and Lettice, by arriving in the middle of it, caused a certain embarrassment.

'I *did* startle you,' she said. 'Does being engaged always make people as nervous as that?—it must be rather stupid if it does, I should think. May I stop? I'll be very quiet, Margot.'

'You needn't be quiet, Lettice,' said her sister; 'I want you to come and speak to your new brother.'

'I don't want any new brother instead of Allen, thank you,' said Lettice. 'Wherever Allen is, *I've* not left off having him for my brother.'

'Nugent is quite a different kind of brother from poor Allen, Lettice,' said Margot, with a faint line of displeasure showing itself upon her forehead.

'You never did like Allen, did you? I liked him. Shall you like Mr. Orme, do you think?'

'I am going to try,' said Margot.

'Margot is going to marry me some day, Lettice,' said Nugent, 'so you see you and I ought to be friends.'

'If you marry her, you'll take her away from us all—we want her most! If you would let her stay here, I don't mind being friends, I'll be your sister even—yes, I will really—if you'll promise me you'll never want to marry her. You can be engaged quite well without that, you know—lots of people are.'

'It will be a long time before I leave you, Lettice, so you mustn't begin to worry about that now. And you like Nugent, you know.'

'I like him as a now-and-then visitor,' Lettice admitted, 'if he'll only go on being that.'

But, in spite of this guarded approval, she gradually relaxed under Nugent's advances until she even condescended at parting to invite him, entirely on her own account, to come again soon. 'If you come early in the afternoon,' she said encouragingly, 'you're nearly sure to find *me* at home!'

Ida was never weary of congratulating, wondering, and questioning. 'When did you first begin to fancy you liked him, Margot? What first made you think he was in love with you? Are you very, very happy? What does it all feel like? I never thought you would care for anybody, somehow. And you *do* care for him? you are quite certain? I am sure he is very nice—*Guy* is so fond of him!'—and she sighed, 'I wonder if Guy and I will ever be like that. He is so strange now, so changed, Margot. He was at that fête last night (I never thanked you for letting mother take me instead of you—thanks, awfully, now, dear), but he hardly spoke to me; do you think he doesn't care for me after all?—he did once, I know! Margot, if he went away now, and nothing ever put things right between us, I think it would kill me. But you are so happy—you have no time to feel for me any more!'

And Margot had to answer and console her as best she might; it made her anxious to see the intensity of Ida's attachment for Guy Hotham, and she dreaded to think of the consequences, should he prove to have had no serious intentions.

Orme, at all events, was perfectly happy—if he had not been, he would have been hard to please indeed. He had won the prize—beautiful, proud Margot was his; scarcely a day passed without their meeting, if only for a few minutes, and the prospect of seeing her when his work was over made him less rather than more sensible of the wearisome monotony of much of his labours—the

waiting in a stifling court for his case to come on, the conferences and consultations, the drafting of complicated instruments which taxed his ingenuity without exciting his enthusiasm—all this in some way had ceased to be irksome. And when any occasion came for displaying higher abilities, it seemed to him that he had never been in fuller command of all his powers. He had now a double incentive to ambition, and, so far from distracting or enervating, the thought of Margot inspired and fortified him to do his utmost.

Nor did she fulfil her prediction that she should disenchant him as he came to know her better. Had she been ever so exacting and unreasonable, he would still have found her charming, but she made no attempt to abuse her power; she had impressed him once as self-willed and intolerant of anything that interfered with her good pleasure—he found her devoted to Ida, trying as her peevishness was at times. To him, Margot showed a sweet docility which, coming from her, was strangely touching: it seemed as if she found a new and piquant pleasure in submitting her will to another's, and there was a touch of playful exaggeration about this humility of hers that prevented it from being spiritless.

It was happiness that had worked this change in her, for she had never been so happy before; always, till now, a secret discontent with herself and her life had coloured all she did and said. Now that she knew that Nugent loved her, troubles and uneasy recollections were forgotten, he would never call her in question about Allen again—she had silenced all his objections on that score, she had his approval of the course she had taken. The only thought that disturbed her sometimes was that he might come to condemn her once more some day. What if Allen came back and was repulsed by his father—But why meet evil half way? he had not come back, perhaps he never would come back—at least not until Nugent and she were married; he might come then for aught she cared.

It will be seen that Miss Chevening's conscience, in spite of all the arguments she employed to quiet it, still disturbed her for the share she had taken in Allen's banishment. It slumbered mostly, it did not seriously affect her; but time, which softened her step-brother's offences, made her conduct towards him the less excusable in her own eyes, and curiously enough, perhaps, she had never felt this more strongly than after she had vanquished Nugent's condemnation. However, conscience, as some character in a Restoration drama observes, 'is a tender babe,' and certainly has the recommendation of being more easily lulled than most babes. Possibly Margot's self-reproaches did no more than supply a zest to the bliss of loving and being loved, and she was far enough from any real regret that Allen was conveniently lost sight of, if she was not actually capable of hoping that he was no longer alive.

Nugent had, of course, to write and announce his engagement to Millicent, a task which not even his feelings as a lover could make

pleasant. He had not quite forgiven her for so nearly coming between them, and he was conscious, too, that his news would seem to her a confirmation of her fears that he would disregard the warning. Something of these feelings, though he abstained alike from either reproach or apology, crept into his letter in spite of himself. 'I suppose I must not expect congratulations from you,' he wrote; 'if you choose to consider that this is weakness and infatuation, and that I could ever have spoken of love to Margot without having good reason to trust and honour her—why, then you must, and I am sorry, but can't help it. But I think you know me better. She has told me everything—little as I deserved it; and when you have heard the real facts, which I have persuaded her (very much against her will) to let me tell you, I think your sense of fairness will lead you to own that you have been in too great a hurry to be quite charitable' (and here he told her shortly Allen's character and offence, as he had learnt them from Margot's own lips). 'I can't believe, Millicent, that you will be so prejudiced as not to feel some compunction for having misjudged her; now that you know all the circumstances, I won't think, until you oblige me, that you will persist in continuing this estrangement with Margot or show any coldness in receiving her. But if you do, the loss will be yours, not hers, and I need hardly say that any remonstrances or laments you may think fit to make will not have the slightest effect upon me.'

It was not a very politic production, but he was too proud a lover to adopt a more conciliatory tone—it would have been an indignity to his love had he implied that Margot stood in any need of his pleading.

Millicent read the letter at breakfast one brilliant July morning, while the bees were humming over the flower-beds outside the open windows; she had time to master the contents of the letter unobserved, for her mother was not yet down, and the Vicar had not come in from his before-breakfast stroll round the lawn.

She was wounded rather than angered, as some sisters might have been, by Nugent's tone; he wrote as if he expected to find her unsympathetic, if not hostile, and, what was worse, as if he did not particularly care whether she were so or not, except on Margot's account—he did not even pretend that Margot herself was anxious for a reconciliation.

Was Millicent hostile? He had disregarded her warning, he was going to marry this girl; was it such a mistake? If she had been in Margot's place, and had known Allen to be a dangerous hypocrite, a thief, might she not have determined to have him sent away before he brought some open and indelible disgrace upon the family? No; Millicent felt that she herself would not have had the heart—she would have yielded, have given him, however worthless, one more trial. But she could see that another might act differently, and yet deserve no condemnation.

Why had not Margot told her all this? Poor Millicent could

only conclude that she had not thought her friendship worth retaining; or was she too generous to defend herself by blaming another until she was forced to do so? The light way in which she had treated the matter seemed less heartless now—yes, Millicent had been unjust, and her injustice had nearly wrecked her brother's happiness; was it wonderful that he wrote coldly to her?

She could not think him infatuated or weak, she recognised the strength of his character—he would not have yielded to this love if it cost him respect for himself and her. If Nugent acquitted Margot, she could not deserve blame.

And the conviction of this, humbling as it was, had redeeming points for Millicent. She had admired and loved and looked up to Margot so much, it had gone to her heart to separate from her, to feel that she could not be her friend. And the discovery that she had been wrong was not made grudgingly, as is apt to be the case with less generous natures. Millicent actually bore no resentment against Margot for having been misjudged by her, she was not even jealous of her for having won Nugent's love. She was proud, for his sake; Margot was so lovely, so captivating, it was natural that Nugent should be attracted by her; she was glad now, whatever she had been before, that she was to have such a sister-in-law.

If only they would both forgive her and take her into their hearts as before, she was ready to make any sacrifice of her personal dignity; she owed full reparation, and she would pay it.

So, by the time Mrs. Orme had taken her place behind the silver presentation urn, and the Vicar had decided that he was entitled to come indoors, Millicent was able to tell her news with every sign of satisfaction.

'Miss Chevening, is it?' said her father. 'Well, I admire his audacity—one of the loveliest girls I've ever seen. Lucky fellow!'

'I don't see that the luck is all on Nugent's side, really, Cyprian,' said Mrs. Orme. 'I'm not at all sure that Margot Chevening is the girl I should have chosen for Nugent.'

'We have never had an opportunity of meeting that ideal young woman yet, my love; and, really, in the meantime Miss Chevening is a very attractive and charming girl. Nugent can put up with her till the other lady appears.'

'I only wish,' sighed Mrs. Orme, 'that her step-father wasn't such a dreadful person.'

'Chadwick? Yes; I can't say I care about being more intimate with Chadwick than I can help, particularly if he sticks to his present way of life,' said the Vicar; 'but, after all, he's only her step-father; there's no reason why we should see much more of him. Does Nugent say when he intends to set up house, Millie? Shouldn't advise him to do so just yet. I've a notion Miss Margot would be an expensive young lady for a struggling young barrister to start housekeeping with.'

'I don't think Nugent has thought of all that as yet,' said Millicent; 'and indeed, papa, I don't believe Margot's a bit extravagant; you only say so because she always wears such

lovely frocks, but they're quite simple ones, really, only so perfectly made !'

'Are they, Millie ? I dare say you may not believe it, but I never gave her frocks a thought. I was only doubting whether, well as Nugent is getting on, he can afford to give her the luxuries she is used to ; however, that's his affair,' said the vicar, with his mouth full of dry toast, 'so long as she will wait for him. Give them both my love and my—ah—blessing when you write, and ask when we're to see them down here.'

'I hope and trust that Nugent has been guided to make a right choice,' said his mother.

'Oh, I dare say she'll have a little money ; Chadwick ought to do something for her,' said the more secular-minded vicar, as he cracked an egg, 'he's rich enough.'

'That was not at all what I meant,' said his wife in a superior manner ; 'the money is neither here nor there.'

'It is certainly not *here*, my dear,' retorted the vicar, who was in reality far more indifferent to such considerations than his wife ; 'but, for Nugent's sake, I should not be sorry to hear there was a little there. The angel in the house isn't always quite such an angel in furnished apartments—she'll soon moult—can't keep love-birds long on chickweed, you know !'

'Cyprian, I *wish* you would not joke on such subjects. I don't like to hear a clergyman making jokes about angels living in lodgings, it doesn't sound reverent or consistent—to me !'

'You didn't understand the allusion, my love ; I was referring to Coventry Patmore's Angel,' said the vicar mildly.

'I don't want to hear about anybody's angel moulting and being kept on chickweed,' said Mrs. Orme. 'I call it profanity.'

So the vicar contented himself by a comic elevation of his eyebrows in silent appeal to his daughter, and no further reference was made at the time to the engagement.

Millicent wrote a penitent and at the same time gently reproachful letter to Nugent, protesting against his assumption that she would be unwilling to acknowledge her mistake, and assuring him that she fully recognised that she had been wrong. He must forgive her and believe that she had only spoken out of love for him and under a sincere conviction that her statements were true. No one rejoiced more than she did to be able to think that Margot was as lovable as she was lovely, and her only regret was that Margot could not feel enough confidence in her to disabuse her at the time ; she ended with warm congratulations and earnest wishes for his happiness.

'So Millicent has written,' said Margot to him ; 'I have heard from her too. I didn't know you would tell her all about Allen, Nugent !'

'You gave me leave,' he said.

'Then it was foolish of me. Everybody will know it now. I

do hope Millicent won't think it necessary to say any more about it—to me or anybody else.'

'You can trust Millicent—she is not a gossip; but *why* don't you wish her to mention it to you?'

'Because I don't,' she said, with one of her wayward frowns. 'I hate the whole subject. I don't want to hear any more about it. Did I say that very crossly? I can't help it, there has been so much fuss made about it already. You will tell Millicent that I would rather she didn't mention it when we meet, won't you? I can't very well say so myself.'

'But you *are* going to write to her?' he suggested, 'she is longing to be friends with you again.'

'Of course I shall write—soon. But you know, Nugent, though she *is* your sister, she did very nearly make mischief between you and me.'

'Surely you will forget all that now?'

'I'm not sure that I can forget quite so easily. Millicent is so very good, she makes me uncomfortable sometimes. Still, I am very glad she doesn't disapprove of me so much as she did. I shall try to keep her good opinion as long as possible.'

He had to be content with that for the present, though he wished she could have met poor Millicent's overtures with more responsiveness, but evidently the misconception still rankled.

Even this touch of petulant resentment, however, lost any touch of hardness under the charm of the expression which accompanied it, and seemed to indicate that she was less seriously displeased than she chose to represent. And there is no doubt that in her heart Margot was relieved by Millicent's unequivocal surrender, and had no intention of rejecting the proffered olive-branch.

July was drawing to an end, and the turf in the Parks was burnt and cracked, and the trees were turning a darker and deadlier green; in the streets the musical old cry of 'Sweet laven—dar!' sounded like a lament for the expiring season. Day by day the block of carriages grew less complicated, the list of social arrangements in the daily papers shorter and less exclusive. Parliament was talking hopefully about rising, Goodwood was near, Society was arranging its plans for yacht, or moor, or foreign health resorts.

It was a welcome time for most who had been born to or achieved the right of revolving in some one of the rings of the social whirlpool; for Mrs. Chadwick the day when the whirlpool would subside and its prisoners be released seemed anything but a day of deliverance.

On that day she would have to go—not to Cowes, nor Yorkshire, nor the Continent—but to Gorsecombe, to a life she detested, and a husband who declined to be ignored. And her season had not been a success; her sister, Lady Yaverland, had not asked her to her best parties. Margot, just when people were beginning to rave

about her, had thrown all her chances away by getting engaged to a penniless barrister, and Ida was no nearer being engaged than before. Whether Guy or Ida was more in fault for this she could not discover; she might have contrived to ascertain the young man's feelings from himself, if only she could get a private talk with him, but unluckily all her efforts to get him to the house of late had fallen through, whether by pure accident (for he was a youth of many engagements) or intention on his part, she could not determine. And Ida certainly did not manage well; she was shy and constrained when she met him, and every interview seemed to leave them less likely to come to an understanding. Her mother could not even be certain that Ida had not some romantic scruple which might account for this provoking behaviour, and the fear of this helped to restrain her from precipitating matters by some *coup*.

She could not ask Guy down to Agra House, it was too near Hawleigh, and besides she knew that he was to accompany his aunt to Homburg at the end of the season. After his return home of course he would be staying away at various places for the shooting, and even if he came to Hawleigh to hunt, he would probably have got over his fancy by that time.

Mrs. Chadwick felt quite helpless, unless—there was just one chance—unless she could persuade her husband to see that she and Ida required a course of the Homburg waters. Once there, with Mrs. Antrobus as a benevolent neutral, if not an ally, she felt certain that the event she desired would be brought about.

Chadwick came up to town just then, as he had done occasionally throughout the summer, though he made his visits as short as possible. He was more sulky and irritable than usual, and his wife, as he fidgeted restlessly about the drawing-room, comparing it to its disadvantage with that at Agra House, began to feel doubtful as to the wisdom of broaching her scheme just then.

'How you can have lived all the summer in a hole like this I don't understand! Is it fashionable to keep your rooms as dark as if you were in mourning for someone? It makes me feel fit to cut my throat!'

'One must have the rooms cool,' said his wife, 'and that awning makes it possible to sit outside in the balcony.'

'It keeps out all the air here, at any rate; however, you won't stay here much longer now; your time's up next week, isn't it? and then, I presume, I shall have the pleasure of your society at home again?'

'I—I don't think quite just yet, Joshua,' she said nervously; 'I was thinking of taking Ida and Reggie over to Homburg for a few weeks.'

'And who was going to find the money?'

'You are always so liberal about that,' she faltered.

'Oh, I am, am I? But it's beginning to strike me that I don't get value for my money; they're beginning to look shy on me

down at Gorsecombe. I've do doubt they're saying I'm a fellow whose own wife won't live with him, and, putting my own feelings aside, I don't see why I should spend money to have *that* said of me!'

'But I should come back very soon.'

'To tell you the plain truth,' he said brutally, 'I shouldn't care a damn if you didn't come back at all. I've got on very comfortably without you all this time, but it's the look of the thing I mind.'

'It is very unkind of you to say such things to me!' said his wife, from under a handkerchief. 'You know I asked you to come here with us, and you wouldn't! And Ida has been ordered to take the waters, and I'm sure I've tried to be a good wife to you, Joshua, and—and you wouldn't be alone at Gorsecombe either. Margot and Lettice will be at home. How can people talk then—and what do you care if they do?'

'I *don't* care; it isn't that. So I'm to have Margot and Lettice, eh? Well, that's better certainly, but they'll find some way of backing out of it. They're too fine to come and live all alone with me. Margot is at any rate.'

'What am I at any rate?' inquired Margot, who had entered the room in time to catch the last sentence.

'Your mother wants to go to Homburg with your sister and the boy,' he said, softened in spite of himself by the girl's bright beauty as she stood there, smiling interrogatively, 'and she was proposing to send you and the youngest girl down to keep me company at home. I was saying that wouldn't snit your ideas, after the excitement you've been going in for here.'

'Oh, but it would!' said Margot gaily. 'I—I like Gorsecombe. And it would do Lettice more good than the seaside; she is always asking when we are going back. We will both come—unless you don't want us?'

'Very well then, that's settled,' he said.

'And I may take Ida and Reggie to Homburg?' his wife asked.

'Take them to Timbuctoo if you like! I can do very well without Ida; she's no favourite of mine,' he said.

'Thank you, Joshua,' said Mrs. Chadwick meekly; 'and—I'm afraid I shall have to ask you for a cheque—I haven't nearly enough.'

'Then you ought to have!' he retorted. 'Why, you had enough to have lasted you a year when you came up!'

Mrs. Chadwick murmured something about 'everything being so dear in town;' she did not think it advisable to mention that she had left most of her bills unpaid—he would discover that quite soon enough.

'Well,' he said, 'tell me what's the smallest sum you can do with and I'll give you a cheque. I must have no more of this extravagance—remember, or I shall put my foot down in a way you won't like!'

Margot was too accustomed to scenes of this kind to feel any keen distress; but what did pain and alarm her was her step-father's contemptuous reference to Ida, for whom Chadwick never concealed his dislike.

However, it was settled that Mrs. Chadwick should have her way this time, and Margot was well content to go down to rest and quiet at Gorsecombe, where Nugent would probably find time to be. Even the prospect of her step-father's society did not damp her spirits—she was not afraid of him, and he behaved with more consideration to her than he showed for most other members of his family. Margot thought that she would be very far from unhappy.

BOOK VI

NEMESIS

CHAPTER I

LOVERS AND A RENDEZVOUS

MARGOT never did write in reply to Millicent's letter; she should see her so soon that it really was hardly worth while, she said; and it was not until they actually met at Gorsecombe that Millicent knew how far her overtures had succeeded. As soon as they were alone together, she caught Margot's hands and looked up into her face. 'Margot,' she said, 'can't you forgive me? Mayn't we be friends as we used to be?'

Miss Chevening bent down and kissed her on the forehead. 'You ridiculous Millicent!' she said. 'Of course we may.'

'But say you forgive me!' insisted Millicent.

'Forgive you?' repeated Margot; and in spite of her smile there was a touch of impatient displeasure in her voice. 'Oh, yes, yes!—if I have anything to forgive you for—there, let all that be understood; there's not the least necessity to go over it all again!'

So Millicent had to submit to be taken back into favour in this high-handed fashion, which even she found a little trying to her temper. But she was soon completely subjugated, as were all at the Vicarage, by Margot's acceptance of her position as one of the household. The Vicar was charmed by her playful deference to him; Mrs. Orme wished she showed more interest in village work and topics generally, but admitted that she had a wonderful gift of brightening any place she entered. 'And it brings Nugent down here,' she would conclude; 'we shall see more of him than we used to. I really think this engagement is a good thing.'

Nugent had come down at the same time as Margot and Lettice, having no vacation work to detain him in town, and being determined to set aside any professional considerations rather than break the spell of these long, happy days, few hours of which were spent away from his love.

Constantly as he saw her, they were seldom absolutely alone together. Gorsecombe society considered that their behaviour to one another in public was not lover-like enough; and even in private he was sensible of a certain fastidiousness in her which made him critical of his own utterances. But she let him see, too, with a pride that scorned any shallow coquetry, how thorough was her content to be with him, how completely her heart was his. She was the dearer for the reverence she knew how to inspire in him, and their intimacy was invested with a delicate charm that kept it from all danger of palling.

Margot was very happy in these days; she broke into little snatches of song from pure lightness of heart; she found it an effort sometimes to control herself to walk sedately, as she went about the house or grounds; everything and everybody, with hardly an exception, had become interesting and delightful in the Gorsecombe she had once found so dull.

And yet, at home, there was a cloud which, much as she would have liked to disregard it, cast a shadow on this joyousness! Her old involuntary dislike and repulsion to her step-father had begun to revive of late, heightened this time by an undefined terror. He was away most of the day, driving or riding about the country, and returning to dinner in the evening in a condition varying between two extremes—sodden taciturnity and boisterous hilarity. He took wine freely at dinner, and she could see that he was in the habit of drinking heavily during the day. In every respect he had greatly deteriorated; he was less careful of what he said before her; there was an extravagance in his geniality, a wild light in his eye at times, that made her dread some violent outburst. She was glad when she could rise from the dinner table and join Lettice in the drawing-room, where he never followed.

The fact was that his sentiments towards his beautiful step-daughter were rather complicated. He admired her; he would have been fond of her had she shown any sign of affection for him; as it was, he was quite able to see that her dutifulness was a matter of expediency, and that in her heart she did not respect him, in spite of his blustering attempts at authority or his clumsy efforts to indulge her. The engagement with Nugent roused a dull resentment; he had not been consulted, had been left out of the matter; he would have been ready enough (if for no other reason than that his wife was opposed to the match) to behave handsomely had his assistance been asked; but Margot had chosen to dispense with it, for which he bore her a secret grudge.

He was glad to have her there, nevertheless; it suited his humour—when he was in a fit state for such amusement—to try to provoke her proud spirit. He enjoyed seeing her eyes sparkle with anger, as she bit her lip to keep from retorting to his allusions to her family. At the same time, he was careful not to go too far; in his worst moments hitherto, he had never entirely lost an involuntary awe of this girl, which protected her against attacks

that she might not have found it possible to ignore or overlook.

She was willing to bear much rather than that he should expend his ill-humour upon its legitimate objects—her mother and Ida. Their absence abroad was the grievance which seemed to arouse his chief displeasure. He spoke of it, the expense, the uselessness, with a smouldering ferocity that might break out into a sudden blaze at the slightest pretext. Margot knew what hopes were associated with that stay at Homburg. For Ida's sake, she dreaded a disappointment; she had been charged by her mother to keep Chadwick in good humour at all hazards, but the strain on her nerves and temper was very severe at times.

As before, however, her natural buoyancy and perfect health carried her through. She could not mind anything much—not even the almost nightly penance of bearing with the humours of a half-drunken man; not even the prospect of renewed dissensions when her mother relieved her from her duties—now that she had Nugent's love to sustain her.

She was silent even to him, concerning such disagreeables as she had to bear; she scarcely remembered them in fact, after they had once passed; and much of the indifference with which she met her step-father's provocations was due to the fact that her mind was happily engaged in recalling what had passed during the day.

She rejoiced in the assurances every day brought her of the depth of Nugent's love, the supreme power she could exercise over him at will; she felt herself surrounded by an atmosphere of universal adoration which she had never appreciated before. At the Vicarage they made much of her; the Eddlestone girls were her devoted slaves and admirers. Her romantic choice of Orme, when it was rumoured that some of the oldest names and finest estates in the country had met with rejection at her hands, disarmed the jealousy of the most envious rivals; all spoke well of her, even in her absence; she won interest, sympathy, hearts, wherever she went.

And it was only natural that the consciousness of all this should produce a pleasant sense of self-approval that consoled her for the less agreeable side of her life. It made her view her behaviour to her step-father—her patient submission to his perversities—her endeavours to put as good a face as possible upon her home life before the prying eyes of Gorsecombe gossips, in something of an heroic spirit.

Heroine or not, there came a time when her stock of forbearance was exhausted. She was sitting over the dessert with her step-father, who had been glowering and growling during the whole of the meal with even less than his usual regard to the presence of the servants. Margot was feeling tired and dispirited; Nugent had been called suddenly to chambers, and this time on a matter he must attend to. It had been hot and close all day, and she had gone to tea with the Eddlestone girls, and come back with a headache.

The evening post had just come in, and Chadwick was reading

the letters that had been brought him, when he flung two of them across the fruit to Margot.

'Perhaps you'll be kind enough to explain what these damned things are about?' he said.

'They seem to be bills,' replied Margot calmly. 'One is the jobmaster's and the other the dressmaker's.'

'I am able to see that for myself. Why hasn't your mother paid them? What the —— are they sent in to *me* for?'

'I really can't tell you,' she said with a weary disdain. 'No doubt mother will be able to explain all about it.'

'I shall take good care that she *does* explain! Perhaps you don't know that she had an allowance which was enough to settle twenty such bills as these? Do you suppose I should have been fool enough to give her more if I had known she had left any accounts unpaid? She distinctly gave me to understand when I gave her a cheque for this German bath nonsense that she owed nothing anywhere!'

'Isn't it possible that you misunderstood her?' said Margot; not, however, feeling much confidence in her suggestion.

'No, it's not. I tell you your mother got that last cheque out of me by false pretences—by what was nothing more nor less than downright lying swindling!'

Margot rose. 'You can't expect me to listen to this!' she said haughtily.

'Stay where you are, do you hear!' He looked so savage, with his eyes glaring at her out of the gloom, that she stood by her chair without attempting to leave. 'Do you think I married to let myself be ruined in this way? Have you any idea what your mother with her fine ideas and her smart friends has cost me already? How do I know what bills she's run up since you've been away? I'll not be made a fool of any longer. She shall come back at once, or I'll go out and fetch her myself!'

'If you do that,' said Margot, 'you will do more harm than you have any idea of. You will most probably ruin—yes, ruin—Ida's health and her happiness too!'

'What the devil do I care for Ida? If the truth was known, she's had the greatest share in all this extravagance. I'm not blind. I know your mother is setting her heart on a grand match for her. She don't deserve it—a whining, puling, affected thing like that. If it was *you* now! But you've chosen to take up with that barrister fellow. And just mind this: I'm not going to stand by and let my money be flung into the gutter to please your mother, or Ida, or anybody else. Why d——n it all, I turned my only son away for not much more!'

'I wish you had turned us away instead!' she said passionately.

'I may come to that yet, with some of you,' he retorted. 'I'm near the end of my tether.'

'If you are near the end, I am nearer,' she said. 'How dare

you talk as if you were ill-used and cheated by us? Why did you marry my mother? You did not even pretend it was for *love*—you wanted someone who would help you to make a position here. Would anybody come here—would the people about here even speak to you now, if it was not for *us*? You know they would not! And now—now you have got your position, you are doing all you can to disgrace it, and us. You insult our friends when they come, you refuse to pay the slightest attention to ordinary civilities, and you wonder that mother is willing to go away anywhere, to be away from you a short time! You ought to be grateful that she does not refuse to live in your house at all. I wish she would and take us all—anything would be better than this! You are rich—how rich I don't know, but you *are* rich—and it is mean and cowardly and tyrannous to complain of expenses which can be nothing to you. You expected certain things from us; how have we disappointed you? What have I done, what has any of us done, that you should say such things of us?’

He sat there with open mouth, listening to this tirade; she looked so superb in her rage that his own fury, which was mostly worked up by the action of drink on an inflamed brain, exhaled in sullen admiration.

‘I wasn't speaking of you,’ he said; ‘you're perfect, I know,’ he added, with what was only a perfunctory sneer. ‘You're not very flattering to me, I must say. I never said I wanted to get rid of *you*, or grudged you anything, did I?’

‘I will be treated as the others are,’ she said.

‘Well,’ he went on, ‘I got excited. I didn't mean to blame you about those infernal bills—damn the bills!—but, for all you say, I think I've got some right on my side, and I don't mean to stand this sort of thing for ever. However, I dare say I said things I'd better have left unsaid, though, by God! it wouldn't take much more to make me as good as my words, too. The bills can wait till your mother comes back . . . and—and shake hands, like a sensible girl, and say no more about it.’

He held out a great hand, and Margot, feeling that she should infallibly break down if she remained there any longer, just touched it with her own and hurried away.

Chadwick helped himself from the spirit-decanter, after which he sat musing.

‘Damn it!’ he said half aloud, ‘I like her pluck; she turned on me like a little queen. . . . Pretty things for a man to hear from his step-daughter. If the other girl had said half that I should have killed her, I believe!’

If Margot had come away victorious, she was in no mood to exult over her success. She was a little ashamed of it; she hated these sordid quarrels. By reminding him of what he owed to his marriage, she felt that she had descended to his own level. And yet she had averted a real danger; he was capable just then of carrying out his threat if her sudden blaze of indignation had not

sobered him in a way that could not have been expected. She thought of her mother, with her feeble stratagems and unnecessary deceptions, and trembled for the future. As to her own, she had less uncasiness; soon she would be away from all this—safe with Nugent. But Ida? If Ida missed making this marriage by any chance, what a life would be hers, under her step-father's sneering banter, varied by such threats as he had just used, without her own power of self-protection! No; that should never be! Ida should live with her; she should not be left to wither under a blighting sense of dislike.

But Margot felt too shaken and unstrung by that evening's encounter to write to Nugent, as she had intended; she could not have written without betraying her distress and anxiety in some way, so she preferred to be silent. The next morning she had letters which brought back her gaiety—one from Nugent, the first he had ever written since their engagement, full of his misery at his absence from her and announcing his return that evening—the other from Ida, written in the highest spirits from Homburg. She was 'happier than she had ever had any idea of; Guy had spoken at last; they had both been very silly in not understanding one another sooner; it seemed that he had actually taken it into his head that she did not care for him. Not care for Guy! As if——' and here followed raptures in Ida's usual hyperbolical strain.

But Margot felt all her fears of the previous evening disperse. Ida was safe now,—safe and happy, and Nugent was coming back! what did anything else matter?

'Why, Margot, you kissed me on *both* cheeks!' exclaimed Lettice, after releasing herself. 'Is—is anything the matter?'

'Nothing, you uncomplimentary child!' said Margot; 'only you look so nice in that pretty pink frock. I couldn't help it.'

'I think my blue is nicer, but it isn't the week for that,' observed Lettice. 'Margot, papa's gone out for all day, he won't be home to dinner. Aren't you glad? Now *I* can have dinner with you!'

'You shall, pet; and do you know what we will do this morning? You shall get Susan to help you with your habit, and we will have a long ride together, just you and I.'

'And take Yarrow?' said Lettice, with dancing eyes.

'Not Yarrow—he's not strong enough for a long run, poor dear!'

It has been mentioned already that Margot was now able to gratify her love for riding; Lettice had begun to learn in town, and the Vicarage pony, a quiet animal, was, as to-day, generally at her disposal. Lettice acknowledged the wisdom of leaving Yarrow at home, the pony was brought round from the Vicarage stables, the boy saddled Margot's mare, and she and Lettice set off in high spirits.

They had no one in attendance, as the coachman had gone with Chadwick and the dog-cart. Lettice chattered all the way through

the village and along the road to the downs; she had already regained much of her health in Gorsecombe air.

'We must be turning home now,' said Margot at the end of a delicious canter over the springy turf, along the back of a ridge commanding a great expanse of rich country lying bathed in a shimmering haze of August sunshine; 'we mustn't be late for lunch; the Eddlestones are coming to tennis afterwards. Have you enjoyed it, Lettice?'

'N—not *quite* so much as the pony!' said Lettice, conscientiously. 'Don't you think your horse would like to look at the view a little now, Margot?'

'Oh, Lettie!' said Margot, laughing, 'we won't canter any more, if that is what you mean, but I thought you were going to be such a horsewoman.'

'I'm not a horsewoman yet. If I'm anything, I'm a ponygirl, I suppose. And I like galloping fast very much, if it wouldn't take my breath away so.'

So, seeing that Lettice was not yet completely at home in the saddle, Margot went quietly home by the road which led past the village green.

'What a lot of people!' said Lettice. 'See, Margot, they're putting up swings and a steam-circus and tents; there's going to be a fair there this evening.'

There certainly were more people about the village than usual, and it was necessary to be careful in threading their way through. When they were entering the gates Lettice said: 'Margot, am I sitting *very* crooked?'

'You sit very nicely, Lettice,' said Margot. 'Why?'

'Because there was a man who stared at me so—in such a queer way, so I stared at him. And he was like—like somebody, and I can't think who,—somebody I know; it was only just the eyes, you know. I wish I could remember!'

'It was rude of him to stare,' said Margot, 'but it's not very likely he was criticising your seat, dear. I shouldn't trouble my head about him.'

But as Lettice was running upstairs to change, she stopped and said softly to herself, '*I* know now who had eyes like that—*Allen*! But the rest of the face wasn't like him at all.' And she did not mention it to Margot, who, she perhaps divined, would not be pleased at the introduction of his name.

The Eddlestones came to tennis, and left late, after making arrangements for a picnic expedition the next day.

'What will you wear to-night, miss?' asked Susan, as Margot came up to her room to dress.

'Oh, anything,' said Margot; 'there are only Miss Lettice and I, you know; it's absurd to dress.'

'Yes, miss. Oh, there was a message I was to give you—to ask you most particular to be down at the summer-house, the stone one, by half-past nine to-night.'

‘Then—is Mr. Orme back, Susan? have you seen him?’

Susan smiled demurely. ‘I wasn’t to mention no names,’ she said; ‘he seemed to think you’d know who it was.’

‘I didn’t know Nugent was so romantic,’ thought Margot; but all she said was: ‘On second thoughts, Susan, you can put out my dress as usual.’

‘Very well, miss,’ said the handmaid.

Lettice usually went to bed about nine, though she pleaded for a little license this evening. At length Margot was able to induce her to say good-night and go upstairs, but it was a little past the half-hour when, throwing a light shawl over her head, she went with a light step across the lawn and along the path to the place of rendezvous.

‘I shall have to scold Nugent for sending me a verbal message,’ she was thinking; but she knew that her rebuke would not be very severe.

Someone was waiting there in the shadow by the Indian fir. But surely that was not Nugent’s figure? It came forward in a hesitating, slouching way into the moonlight, and, starting with an irrepressible gesture of dismay, she recognised the face—changed but unmistakable—of Allen Chadwick!

CHAPTER II

A RETROSPECT

Sick in the world’s regard, wretched and low,
A poor unminded outlaw sneaking home.

Hen. IV. Pt. 1, a. 4.

AFTER an absence and silence of nearly two years, Allen Chadwick was once more returned to the home where his presence was so little desired. What had been his history during all those months? Had he made good his promise of returning with wealth that should justify his disobedience? Why had he come home at this particular time, and what was his object in seeking to see Margot alone and in secret?

These are points as to which it may be presumed that some at least who have followed this history so far will require to be informed, and, this being the most appropriate and convenient place for such information, it shall be given with as little tediousness as possible.

We left him, it may be remembered, going out to Bombay, as a saloon passenger, on the P. & O. steamer ‘Chusan.’ Amongst the

passengers was a man named Denham. the only person on board with whom Allen formed any real intimacy. Denham was a communicative man, by no means exacting as to his acquaintances; he found Allen a good listener, and took a sort of fancy to him during the voyage, which was not many days old before Allen had been told most that there was to tell of the other's affairs.

Denham, it appeared, had been a coffee-planter in the Wynaad district in Southern India, and, in a part of the estate not yet under cultivation, accident had discovered what there seemed every reason to believe was a valuable reef of gold-bearing quartz. He kept the discovery to himself for a time, got rid of part of his property, and, having bought up all that he could get of the land under which the reef was estimated to lie, formed a company to open up and work the mine. He had been to England for the purpose of getting this company properly floated, and superintending the construction of the necessary mining-plant. In a short time the mine would be at work, and in the opinion of all the experts he had consulted would yield a fabulous return. Southern India, it was confidently believed, was to prove a second California.

All this, and much more, he told Allen, as indeed most people with whom he fell into conversation. To Allen the very name of gold-mine was enough: he was going out against his will to a business he detested in advance, in which he would be under the supervision of a man who had been expressly cautioned against trusting him, in which no efforts of his could advance him materially. He confided to Denham his distaste to what lay before him, and his longing to escape from it if possible. Denham commended his spirit, and in a moment of expansion proposed one day that Allen should accompany him to the scene of action—they would find something for him to do by-and-by in the accountant's office, as he had some acquaintance with figures. Allen caught eagerly at the idea, but he was anxious to have a more personal connection with the venture. He had money, more money than he would need now, he explained, Was it possible to get shares still, and would Denham help him to do so? Denham, after a little demurring, undertook to manage this, and he did so out of sheer good nature. He was a thorough believer in the mine himself, he was pleased with Allen's enthusiasm, the shares were certain to go up, the deposit amount was small, he would take care that the young fellow, who evidently had no harm in him and only wanted looking after, incurred no loss by them; and so the greater part of the money which Chadwick, in a fit of compunction, had given his son at parting was laid out in this manner.

Arrived at Bombay, it was not difficult to get his baggage and be safe in the Madras train with Denham, before Chadwick's manager, who had no means of identifying him, had discovered that he had been given the slip.

Five days later, Allen was at the Mattaputty mine from which so much was expected. His notions had been of the vaguest kind,

hardly going beyond a vision of men in red shirts washing immense nuggets out of cradles. And the reality was a disappointment at first. There was plenty of activity, but not of the kind he had imagined; coolies were cutting down trees, making roads, and building sheds, huts, and bungalows. Along the face of the bare and rugged hills, tunnels and shafts were being driven to ascertain the dip of the reef, but he had not understood till then what long and laborious processes were necessary before any appreciable amount of gold could be extracted.

Denham, however, was always sanguine; nothing serious could be attempted until the elaborate 'batteries' and 'stamps' arrived and were set up. In the meantime the assayers in London, to whom samples had been sent, reported an average yield little short of fabulous.

Allen soon caught the prevailing tone of enthusiasm. But there was nothing for him to do; his duties were simply nominal at present, though he had a small salary which enabled him to live. Sometimes, in very weariness of being idle, and impatience with the slow rate of progress, he got leave to accompany the Cornish miners into the tunnels and do such work as was entrusted to him—and dull and exhausting work he found it.

And then there were difficulties and delays; some of the machinery was not sent out or miscarried on the way; the buildings erected to receive it were found unsuitable and had to be rebuilt; after months of unsuccessful labour it was discovered that the miners had sunk their shaft on the wrong side of the dip and were only getting further from the reef. All this did not prevent very roseate reports being issued, nor did it shake Denham's confidence in ultimate success, but it did make the expenses very heavy, and dishearten many who had been hopeful enough till now. At last the machinery was in working order, the masses of stored quartz were crushed and reduced, and gold, though barely enough to pay the expenses of obtaining it, was actually produced.

But the enforced idleness, the feverish, constantly defeated expectation of some sudden good fortune had, as might have been foreseen, a demoralising effect on Allen. He was unpopular with the staff, who looked on him as a useless intruder; he had to make friends as he could among the miners, some of whom were a rough and reckless set; he even associated with some of the Madrassee Eurasians who were employed in the mine and who had most of the vices of their mixed race.

Denham took little notice of him, though he warned him at times against some of his companions, but he was too preoccupied to take much interest in his proceedings.

Left to himself as he was, with no resources to occupy his mind and no regular work to steady him, the wonder was rather that Allen did not go to ruin altogether, than that he should be guilty of an occasional lapse. But the same hope which made any settled way of life impossible to him—the dream of some stroke of brilliant

fortune in which he would share—preserved him from any irretrievable downfall. The knowledge of all that he had borne and was bearing for Margot kept him from losing his self-respect entirely. Every day that passed increased the claim he had on her gratitude, he would not do anything that might make him ashamed to return when he had the power. But there were times when despondency got the better of him, and he took the only way of escaping it that was open to him. And in due course the dry season came on, and he was attacked by fever, which, though not dangerous, lingered obstinately about him, wearing, weakening, and depressing, till the rains brought relief and cure.

He learnt on his recovery that the mine was further from prosperity than ever. During the dry season an unforeseen calamity had befallen them, the waterpower by which all the machinery was driven had failed, the reservoir had proved quite inadequate, and for weeks the works had been almost at a standstill. Allen happened to meet Denham on the day he heard this, and, in the irritable, nervous state his illness had left, blurted out some expressions which the other chose to resent. 'I meant to do you a good turn by bringing you here,' he said; 'I thought I could make something of you in time—but I see I was mistaken. And now you as good as tell me I've swindled you! I'll not be told that twice—you shall make over your shares to me, and I'll give you back what you've paid on them, and the sooner you're out of this place the better for me and for you!'

Allen had not expected this, and pleaded against dismissal, but Denham's patience was exhausted. Allen was of no use in the office, he was glad of an excuse for getting rid of him, so the transfer was made and Allen's connection with the Mattaputty mine came to an end. And the day after this was finally arranged, the tide of fortune turned—another and a richer dip was struck, the mine was in a fair way to pay at last, and Allen was left with the tormenting reflection that he had behaved like an ungrateful fool, and that if he had been content to keep his dissatisfaction to himself and wait a little longer, the shares he had parted with might have realised a handsome sum after all.

However, he had to make his way back by Ootacamund to Madras, where Denham had given him some introductions, though he advised him not to stay in the country but to go home at once. Go home! Allen thought bitterly, what reception would he have there now? Should he make his way back to Bombay and the Behar plantation? He was ashamed to do so after so long a time, and all this enforced idleness had unfitted him more than ever for hard work. He got no further than Ootacamund, where he stayed at the hotel while his money lasted—which was not long; he was reckless now, it seemed useless to be economical. With a wild idea of repairing his folly he took to gambling, and there were card-players there very ready to relieve him of his last rupee. Then he was obliged to find something to do, and succeeded in finding

employment in one of the shops in the town. It was hard but not ill-paid work, and he was able to put by a proportion of his wages to pay his passage to England. For he was longing to get back—not that he had any definite purpose in returning, he certainly did not dream of approaching his father at present—but he was impatient to leave this strange, splendid, unfriendly India, where he felt himself more incongruous than ever. In London he would feel at home, even alone; there would no longer be the great ocean between himself and Margot. Who knew whether he might not find courage to see her some time, when he had earned the right?

Towards the middle of July—the July in which Margot became engaged—he landed in England, poorer in purse and prospects than he had left; and, in London, he could think of no better plan than applying to his old employers. Fortunately for him, they happened to have a vacancy just then, a situation far inferior to that he had held, but one which he was glad to take nevertheless. He had hired a room in Clerkenwell, and there he had lived for nearly a month, going about his daily work in the big establishment with a stolid indifference to the questions and sneers of some who had been employed there with him before, and who were inclined to be curious or merry concerning his short-lived career as a man of fortune.

He lived a solitary life; he had no friends, the aunt he had lived with as a boy had left her old home long ago, and he did not know her address. His life was temperate, he seemed to have lost all taste for amusement of any kind; when night came he was generally too tired to care for anything but sleep. Yet he was not unhappy; he was back in England, in the same country as Margot, he was independent, he felt as if he was doing something to redeem his mistakes.

He did not know she was in London; he thought of her as down at Gorsecombe, he was constantly dreaming of her. One night in particular he thought he had come home and had gone round by the garden and they had met. And she had come forward and taken his hands and thanked him, her beautiful eyes wet with tears, for the sacrifice he had made for her, pitying him for all he had gone through. And then he thought she had explained why she had been silent, and how there was no need for silence now, and in some sweet indefinable way she had made him understand that she loved him and had always loved him, that they would never part now. And, with the wonder and rapture of this still thrilling him, he had awoke to find it a dream!

But this dream left a lasting impression upon him which time deepened rather than effaced. It was so vivid, so lifelike, that it seemed to him like a sign or prophecy sent for his guidance. Why might he not fulfil it?

If he could only see her, and she could know the penalty he had paid for shielding her, surely she would speak at last! Whatever reasons she had had for not avowing her part in the matter before

must have ceased long ago to be of any serious importance. Still, he could not go to his father until he had seen her first. Unless he was able to come back with a full exculpation from the crime for which he had been banished, he might as well stay where he was. And how was he to clear himself without undoing his sacrifice—the one act in all his life which he could look back upon with pride? He would see Margot first; he would tell her all he had gone through on her account, and how tired he had grown of his exile. There would be no need to ask her to speak for him, she would understand, she would be the first to insist on repairing her wrong, his condition was different now from what it had been when he was sent out.

He felt rather than reasoned all this; two things were clear in his mind—that if he went back it should not be in disgrace, that his exoneration should come through Margot. We all—the least imaginative of us—dramatise little scenes with ourselves in the *rôle noble*. Allen pictured that interview beforehand: she would be shocked, remorseful, tender—he would be generous and chivalrous—perhaps even the most extravagant part of his dream did not seem altogether improbable to him. And at last he resolved that he would delay no longer; he would arise and go, like the prodigal in the parable—though, in his case, it was not his father from whom he hoped most. He was like the prodigal in most respects; he had journeyed (though heaven knows unwillingly enough) into a far country, he had wasted his substance with riotous living, he had fed the swine and gone hungry himself, and yet he was not going back in a spirit of utter self-abasement, not all the fault was on his side, not all the forgiveness on theirs—surely he might hope, he too, for the robe and the ring, the fatted calf, and the music. Some pardonable confidence he felt, a justifiable conviction that he had a right to expect admission, that Margot would now be willing to vindicate him.

It happened that he had a couple of days at his disposal, in consideration of having been obliged, as the junior *employé*, to attend at the office as usual on the August Bank Holiday ten days before. And so he had gone down to Gorsecombe one bright August morning. With what mixed emotions he neared the little station! How familiar and unchanged everything looked! There was the road on which he had taken those terrible rides on Hussar; there was the copse where he had waited for Barchard that winter afternoon. His heart sank as he got out of the train; he had arrived—but what was he to do next? How should he obtain that meeting with Margot?

There were no carriages or dog-carts waiting at the station; he saw no one he knew, except the station-master and porter, who did not recognise him. This was not extraordinary, for the beard he had grown and exposure to a tropical sun had greatly altered him; he was poorly and roughly dressed too, having purposely put on his worst clothes.

He walked slowly down the dusty road from the station to the village, thinking over his next proceedings. On an ordinary day his appearance would have provoked curiosity and comment as he passed down the main street, where strangers were always objects of interest. To-day, however, there were other attractions; a local benefit club was holding its annual holiday, which was spent in going to church in procession behind a brass band to hear a sermon in the morning, and dining and disporting themselves generally for the remainder of the day. A small fair with all the usual attractions was established on the green, and the place was too full of visitors from the neighbouring villages, of tramps and gipsies, for Allen's appearance to excite any sensation.

He passed the church, with the black and gold clock protruding like a great eye from the base of its squat slate steeple. Outside in the churchyard were the bandsmen and the banner-bearers, resting under the lime trees with a comfortable conviction that hearing a week-day sermon was not included in their duties. Inside, the members of the club were listening to a discourse to which, being proudly conscious of having subscribed to pay for it, they were critically attentive, with a disposition to resent any dismissal before at least an hour had expired. The wide street and the quaint little shops were all just the same; in the watchmaker's window the same row of fat silver watches dangled, freckling their faces in the sun. There was the same timepiece, constructed of varnished fir cones—one of them had fallen out, that was all. At the bonnet-maker's, there was the same box of frilling in front of the muslin curtains—frilling amongst which a misguided bee was wasting his time, under the evident impression that it was a honeycomb. And the grocer's shop-front showed the same placards; not a tea-chest, nor a jam-pot, nor a jar of sweets seemed to have been removed since he stood there that December morning, while his fate was being decided by Margot—only now the panes were alive with wasps swarming up and down in restless activity, undeterred by the ugly warning which a half-foot layer of their dead and dying brethren below might have afforded.

Presently the club came out of church, decorated with blue rosettes and gaudy green sashes, their red faces wearing a grin of sheepish importance, and then, preceded by the band, slouched up the street to promenade the green until dinner-time. Allen recognised most of them, though they did not know him; he was looking on mechanically at the procession, when presently he saw something which made his heart leap within him.

Two persons were riding through the crowd, one a little girl with long floating auburn hair under her velvet cap, the other, a slender, lissom figure, who was occupied in soothing her spirited little mare as it pranced delicately at the blare of the band. They were Margot and Lettice, the only two beings he cared for in the world. They passed close to him; he could have touched the skirt of Margot's habit—but he could not find courage to speak to her.

She looked far lovelier than the girl who lived in his memory sweeter, happier. And how superbly she sat her horse! They passed on, the little girl looked at him curiously, but evidently without recognition, and now they were clattering round the corner out of sight.

Allen stood there rooted to the ground in the hot sun, looking after them. She *was* here, then—he might see and speak to her before the day closed. He felt strangely excited and yet hopeful. ‘Perhaps,’ he was thinking, ‘by this time next week *I* shall be riding with them!’ For his Mattaputty experiences had at least left him a gainer in one respect—he could ride decently enough now; it was the only means of getting about the country out there, and at one time he had ridden constantly with Denham. The idea of exhibiting this acquirement of his to Margot by-and-by gave him a boyish pleasure; in contemplating it he forgot all that had to be gone through before he could take his place again in home life.

By this time the club had filed into the White Lion, where the dinner was to be held, which reminded Allen that he was hungry. He would dine too; it would fill up the time while he was arranging some plan for getting speech with Margot. At the White Lion he might be recognised, and he shrank from recognition just then; but there was the other inn, the Seven Stars, just opposite, homelier but respectable, he had never been there before. So to the Seven Stars he went.

CHAPTER III.

BUT A LITTLE LONGER.

My Lady verily awaiteth me;
 So that until with Her I be
 For my dear Lady's sake
 I am right fain to make
 Out from my pain a pillow, and to take
 Grief for a golden garment unto me;
 Knowing that I, at last, shall stand
 In that green garden-land,
 And in the holding of my dear Love's hand
 Forget the grieving and the misery.

Austin Dobson.

THE big kitchen of the Seven Stars looked very cool and comfortable as Allen entered.

There was company there, two labourers sat at one of the rough tables, dining on bread and cheese and cold bacon; a postman at another near the settle, who, however, rose hastily as he saw a stranger and removed himself and his food to an adjoining apartment; a very old peasant in a smock frock, who seemed to have

had as much liquor as was good for him, and was seated on a stool quavering unintelligibly to the fire; and, lastly, Mrs. Parkinjean herself on a chair in her usual corner. The sun gave a brilliant transparency to the red curtain and the green plants at the window, leaving the interior of the room in shade.

'Come in and sit ye down, sir, whoever ye be,' said Mrs. Parkinjean. 'I've lost my eyesight, sir, as you can see, and I can't attend to you as once I could, but my dear granddarter will be back in a minute. It's a sad deprivation to me. Minnie'll be here directly; she's only stepped down to the cellar to draw a mug of cider for postman here. You're fond of cider, ain't ye, postman?'

Naturally there was no reply, and the old lady called 'Postman!' then, more persuasively, 'Posty! Ah, he'll have run away when you come in. He's a wonderful shy sort o' man for a postman, so he is!'

Allen gave his order when Minnie reappeared, and sat in the background eating his humble fare, and listening to the labourers, neither of whom he knew by sight. One was a good-looking, stupid fellow, with a sleepy smile, white teeth, and luxuriant whiskers; the other, fair, florid, burly, and opinionated, seemed to be laying down the law on the subject of mowing. Allen listened, partly because there was nothing else to do, partly because he hoped sooner or later to hear some allusion to his family.

'Bumble's a very good mower, he is,' said the burly man; 'a' cuts in and a' cuts out, but a' takes a good deal less ground nor what he used. Reason why—man's older.'

'I earl old Eddards better nor him,' said the sleepy man, with the air of one who speaks under correction.

'Old Eddards is all very well in grass—but what good 'ud old Eddards be with a *lawn*, eh? You cudn't put 'un in a clover-field neither; now, *could* ye?'

'No, you cudn't put 'un to do that, sart'nly,' conceded the other.

'He could cut 'un, mind you, he could *cut* 'un—but he wouldn't git *along*, old Eddards wouldn't. Now, there's *you*, Jim, you can mow pretty well, I will say *that* of ye, and there ain't on'y one fault I has to find with ye—you mows too '*igh*'; you cuts your ground clane enough, but your bottom neb's too fur down the end o' your scythe; this 'and's too fur down the stick, d'ye see? Now, you bring your neb up just *that* fur apart; then you can drive your ground out straight, d'ye see?'

'Yes,' said the other man, too sleepy to resent this advice; 'yes, I can see there's sense in that.'

'Ah, I *know* there is! Now, there's 'Opper, he's a very good mower—he *is* a good mower if ye like—lays his ground out straight, makes a curve just no bigger nor that, lays around him like——! Chadwick's gardener took him on for a job last month up at Agra House, so a' was tellin' me.'

But here, just as the conversation began to be interesting, Mrs

Parkinjea struck in. 'I hope Minnie's been attending to you, sir?' she said to Allen. 'You must mention it if you ain't got all you require. 'Tis a fine afternoon, isn't it? I can feel the sun where I'm settin'. My poor, dear 'usband was allays one for letting in the sun to the very end, he was. He was in the brick-making business, but he wasn't no scollard, dear man,' she rambled on. 'I might have had him now, only he had to go over to Closeborough one day, and he was in a hurry to get back to me, and got caught in that awful storm and couldn't get back nor forwards, and from that moment never had a well moment with the brownchitis, poor thing!'

'Talking o' storms, missus,' said the burly man, 'we'll have one afore we're many hours older, call me a liar if we don't; been brewing up for it since noon.'

'Well, things are too far forward to be damaged now, we'll hope,' said Mrs. Parkinjea, not best pleased at the diversion. 'And, as I was telling you, sir, before I was took up, there was my poor son, he was out in New Zealand, gum-digging, and he come home suddenly and walked from the station, meaning to step in unexpected like and have a bit of fun with his poor father, he being so brown and altered, and on the way he meets someone he knows and says, careless like, "Know if father's at home?" sez he; and they says, "Your mother's downstairs and about again, but your father's dead and buried this three months." And, poor dear boy, he wasn't well for a month after, for he was main fond of his dear father, he was.'

Allen felt a sudden misgiving—what if *his* father, too, had died in his absence? But no, these men had mentioned him just now; Margot had not looked as if any sorrow had happened recently at home; still, he must try to get some information, though he was conscious of having little skill in extracting it; he would lead the talk to Margot as well as he could.

'You're gay here to-day,' he began awkwardly; 'quite a fair going on, I see.'

'It's their club-day here, you see, and that wakes things up a little. Why ain't *you* with 'em, Garge?'

'B'long to the 'And-in-'And,' explained Garge gruffly. 'Our club-day was July. We 'ad the ridgmental band over from Closeborough to it, and there was a deal more swing-boats and merry-go-rounds than what there is to-day.'

'Ah,' sighed Mrs. Parkinjea, 'there'll be fine doings when night comes on. I don't hold with folks making beasts of themselves, keeping other folks from their night's rest; it's time it was put down, to my thinking.'

'Well, I dunno, it ain't a bad thing for *your* business, y' know; look at it that way.'

'I don't encourage none of that in *my* bar. This is a respectable house, and I'll keep it so; if they want to get drunk, they must go over the way.'

'Why don't ye send 'im over the way?' said Garge wit'a grin, pointing to the old labourer on the stool.

'He's had a drop too much before he come to me, and he don't ought to come here at all, as he knows very well, when he's like this,' said the landlady, raising her voice for the old gentleman's edification—not that she produced any impression, as he instantly began to crow and cackle, like an agricultural Mr. Dolls, for a 'lid drop more gin.'

'It's against my conscience to serve him at all,' said Mrs. Parkinjeausterely; 'but he'll only go where he'll be worse treated if I don't keep him quiet. Minnie, take my keys out of my pocket; you can draw Mr. Ricketts a little drop, but it's the last he's to have, mind that! Don't take any notice of him, sir,' she added to Allen, 'it's the band and the 'oliday and that, that's upset him.'

'The band nearly frightened a—a young lady's horse just now,' said Allen, taking courage at this opportunity; 'there was a little girl on a pony with her. Do you know who they are?'

'Garge, you can tell the gentleman maybe,' said Mrs. Parkinjea; 'I can't see no 'orsesnowadays, no, nor yet no ponies, ah, dear!'

'A young lady on a 'orse?' said Garge stolidly, 'there's a many young ladies as rides their 'orses about 'ere.'

'Likely it 'ud be Miss 'Otham from 'Awleigh Court,' suggested his friend; 'I've seen her over here times. Or did ye say there was a little gal on a pony; pooty little gal? long 'air? It'll be Muster Chadwick's darters, sure 'nough. Yes, that's 'oo it'll be.'

'They ain't his darters, on'y his darters-in-law, in a manner o' speaking,' corrected the opinionated man, 'I 'eard Draper Spufford tellin' somebody so t'other day.'

'And Draper Spufford spoke no more than the truth *then*!' put in the landlady. 'I mind their coming here two years last Easter, was it? somewhere about that, I know. Mr. Chadwick hadn't only just been married to those gells' mother. Yes, Jim, you're right. It was Miss Chevening the gentleman saw. I might have known it was.'

'Then hadn't this Mr. Chadwick any family of his own?' asked Allen in a thick voice.

'He hadn't only but one son as *I* ever heard on, and, from all accounts, he wasn't sorry to see his back. Not as there was ever much harm in the young man, from all I could learn; he was more silly-like than downright bad; he used to be about with young Bob Barchard who was a reg'lar bad lot, and went and 'listed for a soldier since, and I don't envy the Queen her bargain!'

'But the son—do you know what became of him?'

'It isn't rightly known where he is now; he went out to America, or some outlandish place like that, and he done something out there that his father wouldn't put up with nohow, for their coachman, Mr. Topham, and a very nice civil-spoken man he is too, was saying in this very room how it was as much now as their place was worth, any of 'em, to mention Mr. Allen (that

was the young man's name, sir) to his father. "He's no son o' mine," said Mr. Chadwick; "if he comes back here, I'll have the door shut in his face. Mind that!" he says. And the curious part of it is, sir, if you'll believe me, that the old gentleman—this one's father—turned *his* son out o' doors too. It shows how these things runs in families, don't it?"

'I suppose,' said Allen, 'you don't happen to know—you didn't hear whether the—the young lady took his part at all?'

'That I'm sure I can't tell you, sir, but from what I did hear, it wouldn't be likely any of them would interfere; they're not *his* blood, you see, and besides, they none of them took to him when he was living in the same house, and I dessay, if the truth was known, they weren't sorry when he took himself off and wasn't likely to trouble *them* no more. And in course all Mr. Chadwick's money 'ull go to *them* now!'

'Ah!' said Allen, 'it's that way, is it? But she—the eldest one, I mean—didn't look the sort of girl to care about the money.'

'I'm a poor blind old lady now, sir, and I can't tell. I've heard she's a sweet pretty face of her own, though proud and high in her ways, but she's been here with Miss Millicent, the Vicar's daughter, once or twice and spoke as pleasant and kind as you please, with a voice that did my 'eart good to listen to. But you can't tell what she had to put up with from such a step-brother as he was. Like enough she'd reason to be ashamed of him, and not want him back.'

'Yes,' said Allen heavily, 'like enough. And is his father living here now?'

'He was a day or two ago, I know. He lives there most of his time; he ain't at all liked in these parts—don't get on with the gentry, so they say, and I 'eard he'd been seen driving about that drunk he couldn't 'ardly keep hold on the reins, and that in broad daylight!'

'I see him the other day,' said Jim. 'It was knock-off time with me, and I was coming home down Piper's Lane when he druv' by. I thart I'd ha' bin run over the way he was going, first one side, then t'other, and a-larrupin' with his whip; "Damn your eyes, stand out o' my way!" sez he. And I did, pretty sharp too. He wur drunk *then* fast enough.'

Allen had heard as much as he could bear by this time; he paid his reckoning and went out of the inn into the dazzling street. So his conjectures were only too true; his father had cast him off; the servants had orders to shut the doors against him! He had meant to go round by the back entrance to Agra House, and try to get someone to carry a message to Margot for him—but now he was afraid.

Still, he wandered up towards the house, half hoping that he might see Margot herself; he came to the well-remembered gates, with their pretentious stone pillars and glittering gas-lamps; no one was at the lodge, but he did not go in, he skirted the palings of the

plantation for some distance till he came to a point whence he could command a distant glimpse of the house and lawn. Perhaps Margot might be sitting or walking there alone? As he drew nearer he heard the faint ring of girls' laughter and voices from the tennis-court, where the game was being played in defiance of the sultry heat. There were four of them playing—two spectators, a girl and a child—was it Lettice?—sat in wicker chairs in the shade—and the tallest of the players, the one in the white tunic over a dark-blue skirt, that must be Margot herself! He stood there, straining his eyes with a yearning attempt to see her more distinctly still, till presently the players changed sides, and she was screened from him by a clump of young firs, though now and then he caught the clear gay tones of her voice.

He turned away with a heavy heart; she seemed so happy, so completely to have forgotten—and besides, it was hopeless to think of trying to approach her just then. Just then! How did he know that he might not have to go back with his purpose unexecuted after all?

But it appeared that fortune did not intend to be so cruel as this, for, as he went slowly with bent head down the lane, still pursued by those happy voices, he saw a trim, smartly dressed form advancing towards him—it was Susan! Here was hope at least, for surely she would befriend him.

'Susan,' he cried eagerly, 'Susan!'

'Upon my word, young man!' said the girl, 'who gave you leave to make so free with my name? I'm not Susan to the likes of you, I can promise you!'

'Don't you know me, Susan? Won't you stop and speak to me?'

'Mercy on us!' she cried, 'if it isn't Mr. —! So *you're* come back, are you?'

'Yes,' he said humbly, 'I've come back.'

'Wherever you've been, you don't seem to have made your fortune there, judging by appearances,' she remarked; 'you are a pretty scarecrow, I must say. And what do you mean to do now you *are* back?'

'I—I don't know yet. Is—is the governor dead-set against me, Susan?'

'You'd better not let him catch sight of you, I can tell you that—partickler when he's like he mostly is just now! But, luckily for you, he's away for a day or two at present—off on the spree, I shouldn't wonder, and small blame to him, with missus away constant!'

'Is she away now, then?'

'Away at a place called 'Umbug—and the proper place for her, I say! She, and Miss Ida, and the young gentleman. There's only Miss Margot and Miss Lettice at home just now. If I was you, I'd walk straight in and say I'd come back and meant to stop—and then let your father turn you out if he could!'

'I can't do that, Susan—not till I've seen *her*.'

'Which her? Miss Lettice? You'll see enough of her after—she's everywhere, she is, and that spoilt, with no one being allowed to say a word to her, I've no patience with it. But I'm not her nurse, oh dear no!—I'm only her maid, and have to put up with all her tantrums!'

'It's not Lettice I want; it's—it's Margot. I must see her, Susan, before—before I can come back.'

'Can't you come back without her leave and licence? But I remember now—didn't you go away at first to please her ladyship? Well, you won't find you please her so much by coming back, it's my belief.'

'What do you know about it? She will help me—she *must*!'

'Must?' said Susan; 'you talk pretty big. One would think you had a reason for it.'

Allen was a little alarmed at having let the word slip out. 'I—I didn't mean it that way,' he said; 'never mind that. Look here, Susan, I've not much time to spare—that is, unless—unless it all goes right. And for that I must see her, and privately, and I want you to help me. You will, Susan, won't you? I'll make it worth your while some day, if I can't now.'

'Much use it is helping *you*! I've tried that before, and much thanks I got for it. But I'll try once more. You be at—let me see—at the round summer-house, down by the lane there, by half-past nine to-night, and I'll engage she shall come out to you.'

'What shall you tell her?'

'Never you mind; but she'll come, and you take my advice, don't you stand no nonsense from her. Show her you're master, and if she's not acted true to you, don't have no mercy on her, for she don't deserve it.'

'What do you mean?' he asked. 'What do you know?'

'Me? I don't mean nothing. If she hasn't been making a fool of you, she hasn't, and that's all about it. Anyway, you can settle that between you this evening; and now I can't dawdle here talking any longer, I'm going down to the village for a bit. I've little enough time I can call my own. As for you—you'd better keep out of the way till you're wanted. Take a walk, I should, away from everybody, where you won't be noticed. And by the time you're back, she'll be there waiting for you—don't you worry yourself about that.'

Susan tripped off down the lane towards the village, humming. 'I've put a spoke in Miss Margot's wheel, this time!' she was reflecting. 'I'd give a month's wages to see her face when she comes out and finds it's *him*! She'd sooner see him dead than back, I'll go bail. Unless I'm very much mistaken, he's got some hold over her. I only hope he's the pluck to use it. And if he does, and gets taken back, why, then he's soft enough for me to catch him yet if I come round him gradual. Ought I to have told him as she was carrying on with that Orme? No, he might have

give it all up and gone away then. She may tell him that herself !'

Susan's idea of the situation was far enough from the truth, but she guessed that Allen had the power of making her young mistress exceedingly uncomfortable, an end which—independently of her own private interest in Allen's return to his family—she was willing to promote to the best of her ability.

Allen had some hours to kill before his interview with Margot, and acted upon Susan's advice in keeping out of the way for the present. He struck a smaller lane which led him to a road below, and then toiled up a dusty road to a hill where he knew of a foot-path which would take him to Bramley Common.

His heart was still heavy, though there was now a limit fixed for this suspense, but, as he walked on in the sultry afternoon heat, he was lulled into a vague content. He had never been very sensitive to Nature, but now, whether the undulating valleys and stupendous mountain ranges of Southern India or the arid monotony of London had taught him to be more appreciative, he was soothed and comforted by the peaceful English surroundings, the plain below with its patches of bright yellow, green and chocolate, the deep blue hills beyond, seen through quivering haze, the clumps of gorse, their gold now tarnished, the chirp of the grasshoppers, and the warm scent of the bracken.

And he went on up the steep track and over the common, till he came to the little church outside which he had stood in the darkness that memorable Sunday night. He unpinned the wooden gate and went to the porch; the door stood open, and he entered and sat down in the first pew. Outside, there was a view of the churchyard with its grey orange-spotted tombs, and small conical yews, and beyond, up the slope of green and gold meadow-land red cattle were grazing in the sunshine. Inside it was still and cool and solemn; the sills of the deep Norman windows and the edges of the pews were stained with brilliant patches of colour from the painted glass; the clock in the tower above ticked loudly in the silence; someone had put some lilies, gladiolus, and sweet peas in the vases on the altar.

He sat there, at first thinking only how good was this absolute rest and shade after the weariness and heat. Gradually the place began to exercise an influence over him; over the porch he had read in faded red letters, 'This is none other than the House of God.' Allen was neither religious nor irreligious; it was rather a superstitious instinct that came over him just then. If he were to pray now, here—might he not have a chance of being heard? He knelt down on the narrow footstool in the pew, and for a moment his ideas left him. He remembered no prayer, he could think of no words. On the ledge in front was a tattered old prayer-book—would not that help him? It fell open mechanically at the place for morning prayer, and his eye fell on the General Confession. 'Erred and strayed like lost sheep' . . . 'Spare thou them, O

God, which confess their faults. Restore thou them that are penitent.' He took the phrase literally, without attaching any spiritual meaning to it; 'restore' for him meant restoration to home, love, character, all that made his life; but that did not affect the fervour and humility with which he repeated the words aloud, half alarmed by the sound of his own voice in the stillness. Then, before he rose, he added, with an odd feeling that he must make the most he could of this opportunity, 'And, O God, make her kind to me; make her ready to tell everything, Amen.'

Then he rose and came out of the church, feeling strangely relieved, sure, indeed, that now all would be well with him. The afternoon was drawing into evening, the sun was sinking in a coppery veil, the white dust on the road was tinged with pink, but the air was closer and heavier than ever, even on the common in the open.

He was worn out, and threw himself down on the rusty bracken, where he soon fell dreamlessly asleep. When he awoke, the moon had risen over the firs, and a few stars shone overhead; in the west, a sullen mass of clouds was rising like a towered and battle-mented wall, a 'looming bastion fringed with fire.' He sat there a while, confused and languid, and then he remembered where he was and what he had to do. Was luck against him even now? Was he too late? He was seized with a horrible fear that this was so, when the clock in the church at the edge of the common struck. He counted the strokes with bated breath: seven, eight, nine—thank God! no more, unless he had mistaken. A clock, distant but still audible, struck down in the valley—no, it *was* nine. There was time to get to the garden and meet Margot yet at the appointed hour, if he made haste.

He hurried back feverishly, clambering down the dim grey path, swinging through the lanes under the interlacing willows and sycamores, where it was difficult to find air enough to breathe, running madly along the road, till he was close once more to the lane where he had met Susan and need hurry no more.

And then he trembled with expectation; his dream—his dream was already close on its fulfilment, he would see her face to face once more, hold her hand, hear her voice. That night he might sleep under the old roof—to-morrow he need not go back to the hard cheerless toil of his London life! Yet he lingered before he could make up his mind to pass the little rustic gate, the old fear had returned upon him. As he stood there, breathing hard after his running, the hot air was stirred and chilled by a sudden breeze, and the chill seemed to fall on his heart. If she refused to speak—if she really did hate him? Ah, no—she could not hate him—not after all she knew, he need not fear that.

Still he stood there in the moonlight, till Gorsecombe Church clock struck the two quarters, and then he went in and along the well-remembered paths to the stone summer-house, a somewhat barbaric record of his grandfather's Arcadian ideals.

He waited, listening eagerly for Margot's step on the gravel; all he heard was the harsh discordance of the organs in the fair down below, and then that faint rustling sweep over the grass, the light eager footfall. She was coming—she was coming at last! He felt comforted, reassured by this eagerness of hers, and filled with a hope too wondrous, too splendid for belief, he rose and went to meet her.

CHAPTER IV.

UNDECEIVED.

Doch du drängst mich selbst von hinnen,
Bittre Worte spricht dein Mund;
Wahnsinn wühlt in meinen Sinnen
Und mein Herz ist krank und wund.—*Heine.*

ALLEN must have been slow indeed of perception if the startled surprise, the shade of embarrassment in Margot's manner had escaped him as she stood there, her eyes looking large, dark, and mysterious under the light shawl, her arms and neck gleaming fair in the moonlight. He thought the change in her manner was caused by his own altered appearance, and grew abashed and conscious again at the impression he felt he produced.

'It's me, Margot,' he said, 'Allen. Don't be frightened.'

The beautiful mouth curled a little. 'I am not frightened,' she said, 'but—but why did you play me such a trick as this?'

'I thought Susan would have told you I was here,' he said. 'Didn't you know who wanted to see you?'

'Susan never mentioned your name. I thought—never mind what I thought now. So you have come back, Allen? I always knew you would come back—but not like this.'

She did not hold out her hand nor smile, she stood there, looking at him with scarcely an effort to mask her displeasure. Was this the welcome he had dreamed of?

'I—I couldn't help coming back,' he said awkwardly. 'I thought you wouldn't mind, I know I'm not much to look at.'

'I was not thinking of your appearance,' she said, with a touch of shame. 'It is your sending for me like this that I don't quite understand. Why did you?'

'Because—oh Margot, can't you guess, can't you see? I can't stand the life I've been living any longer. Why should I, when there's a home I can go to? I want to come back—I've been in disgrace long enough!'

'What is the use of saying that to me, Allen? Your father is the only person who can allow you to come back.'

'And if I went to him what would he do? Send me about my business. That's why I came to you first.'

She was silent for a moment, thinking. Then she said, 'It would certainly be useless for you to try to see him; he is not even at home just now, and—and he is terribly angry with you. I doubt whether he will listen to anything you might say.'

'He will listen to you!' he urged eagerly. 'Margot, you wouldn't speak up for me before. I know—I know, you *couldn't*; but it isn't the same now, you must see it isn't. Will you speak to him now—will you, Margot?'

'Listen, Allen,' she said with a cold gentleness, 'will you promise me to go back to wherever you are living now, and wait patiently a little longer—only a little longer? If you will, I will do what I can for you; but if you stay here or attempt to act for yourself, you will ruin all your chances, remember that.'

He could have fallen down and worshipped her in the enthusiasm of his gratitude. 'I *knew* you'd help me!' he cried; 'I knew you wouldn't leave a poor devil out in the cold when a word from you—. Oh, I will wait as long as you please—I know you will make it as short as you can—I will do anything you tell me, if only I come back at the end. God bless you, Margot!'

He seized her hand and was covering it with kisses. 'Don't!' she said, shrinking fastidiously from this uncouth fervour. 'Don't touch me, Allen! There is nothing to thank me for—as yet. I have promised to help you, and—and I will. Now write down for me where you are living, so that I can send for you when it is safe to do so, and then you must go away.'

There was a small stone table in the summer-house behind them, and she stood by him there as he scribbled the address in pencil on a scrap of paper. 'That's where I live,' he said. 'I wish you could see it, Margot; you wouldn't leave me there longer than you could help, I know, if you did.'

She took the paper gravely and put it in her dress, 'Allen,' she said, 'you—you must not deceive yourself. Your father is very strange now—very violent—he may refuse to forgive you.'

'Forgive me!' he said; 'what for? when he knows all about it.'

'You know best whether he has much to forgive; but I should have thought that after running away as you did . . . and—and was there not some money he had trusted you with?'

'I ran away because I was not going to be under a man who'd been told I was a—*a* thief. And the money was mine—the governor gave it to me—I had a right to spend it how I chose. I thought I was going to make my fortune with it. I very nearly did, too—but that's a long story. Anyway, he'll forgive me all that, Margot; he'll say I couldn't have acted any other way, when you tell him how it was I came to take that locket.'

'You know very well I cannot tell him that!' she cried indignantly.

Allen rose and looked her straight in the face.

'Perhaps you won't mind saying what it is you *will* tell him?' he said sullenly.

'I shall tell him that you have been unfortunate, that you have suffered, and borne hardship all this time, that you are sorry and will never disgrace him again, that it is time to forgive. What more can I say?'

'And you think I'll be taken back as a favour?' he asked; 'come home to be spoken at, and watched, and treated as if I was a downright bad lot; have everybody told all about how I'd been allowed home, though, if I'd had my deserts, I ought to have been left to die in the gutter? No, by God! I've had enough of that the last time. It's not me that has to be forgiven most!'

She shrank back from his hot breath as he placed his face close to hers; there was a look of his father in it just then, distorted as it was with fierce passion, which made her afraid of Allen for the first time.

He saw this. 'I've frightened you now, at all events,' he said. 'So you nearly made a fool of me again—nearly, but not quite! I thought you meant to tell all and take the consequences, whatever they are—they can't be worse for you than me. And it seems you mean to hold your tongue still!'

He felt a savage pleasure in the sight of her beautiful startled face, with the dawning terror in the eyes that had been so proud a minute before.

'What do you want me to tell?' she asked faintly.

'Everything,' he said. 'How you wrote to me from Bournemouth, where you were, asking me to get that locket and sell it and send you the money; how I was caught taking it, and said nothing sooner than get you in a row, and how you came home and kept quiet and made me keep quiet too.'

'I made you keep quiet?' she cried. 'How could I prevent you from telling any story you chose?'

'Oh, you were clever enough!' he said. 'You kept out of my way as much as you could, and you knew better than to ask me to hold my tongue in so many words; but you managed to make me understand for all that. And I was true to you—you know I was! Not many chaps would have done what I did, when the very thought of going out to that beastly plantation sickened me, and I'd only to say a word. But I didn't. I wasn't going to have you despising me; I meant to show you that I could act like a gentleman—better than some gentlemen—if I liked. I thought you'd make it up to me some day; and just now it seemed as if you would. And you meant me to go on bearing it! It's too much—I've been your catspaw all this time; I might have gone on longer if you'd given me so much as a kind word—anything to show you were commonly thankful. But you stand there looking at me as cool as if I was no account to such as you, and I'm tired of it—I tell you I'm tired of it. The governor and I used to be good friends enough once, when we were alone together. He'd be friendly now, directly he knew I wasn't the blackguard I was made out to be. And why shouldn't he know? He *shall* know!'

She was trembling a little, but she made an effort to be contemptuous. 'It will not be very wise of you to go to him with such a story as that,' she said; 'he would not believe it without some other evidence than yours. And if I was questioned I should deny it—do you hear? I can tell him that it is all false, that you have imagined it, invented it while you have been away. I never wrote such a letter, I never obliged you to keep silence—it is all a lie, a lie from beginning to end!'

She compelled him to involuntary admiration, so superbly lovely did she look in her desperate refusal to yield. 'I believe you would,' he said slowly; 'and you would make him believe you, too, if you spoke like that. Margot, you're a devil—a beautiful cruel devil! It's lucky for me that I haven't only my word to go upon.'

'What do you mean?' she said hoarsely.

'Why, I kept your letter. I've got it with me at this very moment.'

'You kept it—kept the letter? You think I shall believe that? Show it to me—I dare you to show it to me.'

'It's very likely I should trust it in your hands now,' he said.

'You pretend to think it would not be safe with me!' she cried in bitter scorn. 'What a pitiful excuse to make! But I know why you make it—I am not afraid of that letter; it is only another lie! I have heard quite enough—I shall have no more to do with you, Allen. If you are mad enough to tell this—this impossible tale, do so, and take the consequences!'

'Take care what you're doing!' he said; 'don't drive me too far. You know very well I'm no liar, whatever other people may be. Look here, Margot, I dare say I'm a fool to trust you, but if you'll swear to me to let me have it back, I'll show you that letter, and then you'll see it's no good holding out any longer.'

'My word is enough,' she said proudly, and held out her hand in imperious demand. 'If you really have it, give it to me.'

It was strange, but though he knew how vital the possession of that letter was to both of them, he never thought of resisting her. He did not even exact a more express promise; it was difficult for him even then to believe her capable of so mean a treachery. He took out a worn leather case from an inner pocket, extracted a paper, soiled and yellow by frequent perusals, and gave it into her hands.

The moon was bright enough for it to be possible to read even that faded ink with a little trouble. Margot stepped out upon the path and read, Allen watching her face meanwhile.

When she came to the end she shivered; a terrible temptation was assailing her. 'You were asked to destroy this,' she said in a low tremulous voice. 'Why didn't you?'

'It was worth too much to me for that,' he answered. How often, when his fortunes were at their worst, his spirits at their lowest, had the sight of that letter been a talisman to him, reminding him, as it did, that even his life had held one bright episode!

'This is my letter,' she said; 'you admit that yourself. What is to prevent me from destroying it?'

'Nothing,' he said, 'if your word doesn't. Yes, I was a fool to trust you, after all!'

She thrust it back into his hand as if the paper scorched her. 'Take it,' she said, 'or—or I might forget—I don't know. . . . Take it, and use it against me—against us all. That is why you have kept it all this time, why you were silent when you might have spoken! You wished to make your claim as heavy as possible; you knew that every day you were away and every hardship you endured only gave you a greater hold upon me. And now you have come back to turn the tables! It is just—just enough, I suppose; but you might have spared the form of consulting me!'

He turned away his face for a moment. 'I think you'll drive me mad, Margot,' he cried in his pain. 'God knows I never kept it for—that! I kept it because it was the only thing I had that came from you. I've been bad enough, but I should have been worse if it wasn't for having it. And you think it was *that*! I came here meaning to put it to you, whether I hadn't been punished enough for your fault. I thought you'd see it was fair now that I should be cleared, and the blame put on the right shoulders. I thought, when you saw what I was, you'd feel a bit sorry and willing to make it up to me like. But I no more meant to threaten or—do anything against your wishes than—than that moon there. It was you that forced me to say what I did. When I heard you talk as if you'd forgotten, and didn't mean to remember all that was, and promising as a great favour to ask the governor to forgive me for what I never did, why, it wasn't in nature that I shouldn't speak plain! Is it so much, I ask you, to speak the truth now and have justice done to me? I'm so miserable, Margot—miserable and lonely, and sick of it all; no one to care a damn whether I'm ill or well, alive or dead! And coming back like this, and seeing the old place, and you again, oh! it isn't wonderful I can't feel as if I could stay away for ever—though I won't be forgiven out of favour; no, I'd sooner go back and drudge till I died than that! But you can clear me, if you only will.'

'You must clear yourself,' she said in the same low voice. 'I cannot go to your father with such a confession as that. At least—I *will* not—there! You have your character in your own hands, and it is for you to speak—not me.'

'You treat me like the dirt,' he said; 'you always did. You'd sooner be cut in pieces than be humble now, even when you're worsted. Well, if I'm treated as dirt, I'll behave like it; I shan't get less credit for it. I *will* clear my character—there! I will come back and take my place among you all, whether you like it or not.'

'Yes, you will come back,' she said; 'you will take your place again—but not amongst us. We shall at least be spared that!'

'Not amongst you?' he repeated. 'How do you mean?'

'If you really don't understand what the effect of this will be, I will tell you. You don't know what your father has been of late. He hates us—yes, I believe he hates us all in his heart. He feels that we are a restraint upon him; he would be only too glad of an excuse for ridding himself of us all—all! And if—if this story is proved true, he will make no distinctions; he will declare it was a plot—a plot to ruin you; he will say that we were all guilty alike. We shall be disgraced—turned out of the house!'

'No, you will not; I will take care of that, Margot. He shall not hurt you.'

'You—you! What influence did you ever have with him when you were at home? And now, you will have difficulty enough in making your own peace. But *ours*—no, you will not be able to save us. And even if he listened to you, if he condescended to keep us, do you think *I* would stay, whatever the—the others did? Why, rather than live here when *that* was known and talked about everywhere, as it would be—your father will not spare us, I know—rather than do that, I would go anywhere, bear anything in the world. If you are expecting that all will go on exactly as it did before, you make a mistake, and it is as well that you should understand that at once!'

There was no violence in her manner; she spoke with a repressed, concentrated scorn shrivelling as an acid, only the heaving of her breast and the trembling she could not control betrayed the white heat of passion that consumed her.

His heart swelled at her injustice, her ungrateful unreasonable-ness. 'Ah,' he said bitterly, 'you can't find words hard enough for me! Do you suppose I don't know, without that, how you despise me, and hate the very sight of me? And yet, tell me this—what have I ever done to you to deserve to be treated like this? Was it my doing that I was sent away? Isn't it natural that I should want to be taken back after all this time?'

She had sunk down on the bench, and was covering her face with a low moan; she made a writhing movement of pain at the last speech of his, and then raised her head as she replied hopelessly—

'Natural? Oh, yes, it is perfectly natural. It is I that am unnatural, I suppose. I—I can't help it. You must come back, it must all be told—it is justice, I admit all that—anything you choose, but I cannot be expected to—to *welcome* you, can I? Oh, what a mean, miserable business it all is, and no escape, no excuse. If I had known—if I had known!'

She sat there, swaying under her burden of crushing shame, and he sat at some distance from her, awed by the sight of this dumb misery, trying to persuade himself that he could not be rightly held to blame for it, and yet with an ever-growing self-reproach. Some might have found a sweetness in the spectacle of such humiliation, Allen only had an uneasy sense of being somehow in the wrong.

Suddenly Margot started : 'There is some one in the garden—on the lawn,' she exclaimed in a whisper. 'Look!'

From where they sat they could see the grey tennis-court indented by deep black shadows, and there, past the lowered tennis-net, a small figure was flitting noiselessly across.

'It's Lettice!' cried Margot; 'she must not see you here—come into the shadow, quick! I will go to her, and send her in. Stay where you are till I come back!'

'No,' he said; 'let me see her—let me speak to her, Margot. She—she used to like me once!'

'Why should you see her? Do you want to make her as miserable as you have made me? Let her be for to-night, poor child—she will know soon enough!'

He dropped back cowed at this, and Margot went to Lettice. 'I've found them,' cried Lettice. 'I knew I'd left them there.'

'You know you ought not to be running about the garden so late as this,' said Margot; 'Susan should not have allowed it!'

'Susan never came to me to-night, and I was just putting myself to bed when it suddenly struck me that I never gave Pussie Eddlestone back her bangles. It was at tennis this afternoon, and she took them off while she was playing and asked me to take care of them for her. So I hung them on a branch out of the way, and somehow I forgot all about them till just now—wasn't it funny of me? But there they were, just where I left them, and they haven't got rusted or anything, Margot, look.'

And Lettice held out two silver bangles adorned with foolish little dangling nuts. Margot felt a bewildering sensation of strangeness. Pussie Eddlestone—the tennis party, only that afternoon—how far away it all seemed!

She tried to speak as usual, but her voice shook. 'You shouldn't be so careless, dear, and—and it is late; now you have found them go in, go in at once!'

'What is the matter, Margot?' Lettice asked quickly. 'Your hands are quite cold, and oh, how they are trembling! Was it you I heard talking to somebody just now? I *did* hear talking, I'm sure. Who is here?'

'No one—no one,' said Margot hastily. 'Go back to your room, Lettie.'

'Now I'm *sure* somebody is here—for you've been crying, Margot!' Then Lettice caught Margot's arm impulsively. 'I know what it is,' she cried; 'Allen has come back—he is in that place over there. I shall go to him.'

'No, Lettice, I forbid you—do you hear?'

But Lettice was already skimming over the moonlit lawn in the direction of the summer-house, and would listen to no commands to return. Margot was constrained to follow; she was powerless now—after all, it mattered so very little!

As she came near, she heard Lettice's eager greeting: 'Oh, Allen,

Allen, you have come back! I knew you wouldn't stay away always, I *am* so glad!

When Margot reached them, Lettice was scrutinising Allen as he sat there with her hands laid on his shoulders. 'I wasn't sure it was you, quite at first,' she was saying. 'You look so tired and shabby, and sorry, Allen, dear!'

'I'm all that, Lettie,' he answered.

'I suppose that's why Margot was crying so?'

'Was it?' he said grimly. 'I think she was crying on her own account, Lettie, not mine.'

'Oh, no—not that—*were* you, Margot? Why *should* she, you know? And, now you've come back, Allen, and I'm sure papa will forgive you when he sees how poor you are—though he was dreadfully angry at first, oh, dreadfully! Then you will live here with us, just as you used to, and you won't do anything naughty again, and have to go away again, will you?'

'When Allen comes back,' said Margot, 'it is we who may have to go away, Lettie.'

'Why? We are not naughty, Margot! Oh, I don't believe that—do you, Allen? You won't want to have us sent away—why, you would be all alone, you know!'

'I can't stand this,' said Allen. 'Lettie, do you see this paper?'

'Allen!' cried Margot quickly, 'you will not tell her—you can't do *that*!'

'Wait till I have done,' he said roughly. 'Here, take this paper, Lettice, in your two hands so—don't look at it. Now tear it across and across, as small as you can—that's the style—there!'

Margot gave a quick gasping sigh, as she stood spell-bound, while Lettice tore the letter into fragments before her eyes. She could not speak, could not even think, for conflict of her emotions just then.

'Couldn't you have done that yourself?' said Lettice, as she let the pieces drift on the stone floor; 'it was quite *easy*, Allen!'

'Oh, yes,' he said, with a curious laugh, 'easy enough; but—well, I thought I'd rather see you do it, Lettie.'

'I wish you had told me what it all meant—I don't like doing things without knowing in the least what I am doing.'

'Can you keep a secret, Lettice? Yes, I see you can. Very well, promise not to tell anyone you've seen me to-night or—or anything, till I give you leave.'

'I promise faithfully—but you are not going away, not again?'

'Yes I am—I must, Lettie.'

'But only for a little while—you'll come back Allen, won't you?'

'Oh, that's all right—don't you be alarmed, it's only for a little while—now, you've promised, Lettie, remember!'

'I always keep my word—I keep it much more than Reggie does—don't I, Margot? And so long as you're coming back, it

won't be at all hard. Oh, Allen, wouldn't you like to see Yarrow before you go? He's been so ill, dear doggie, and we thought he would die once, but he got better directly we came back, and I know he'll be glad to see you! May I go to the stables and get him, Margot?

Margot could not speak, so Lettice took permission for granted and was off in the direction of the stables.

'Margot,' said Allen, when they were alone together, 'I—I'd better be off. I can't wait. I've had about as much as I can bear as it is!'

Margot's answer was a burst of passionate sobbing. 'Allen,' she murmured, when the fit had abated somewhat, 'what can I say? what can I do? It is all so wrong—I feel so ashamed—so ashamed . . . and yet I cannot—no, I cannot do anything!'

Poor Allen could do nothing graciously—it was not in his nature. 'You're not asked to do anything,' he said, brutally enough—only he did not feel brutally.

'You must go,' she said wildly, 'it is the only thing—but, oh, Allen, I *am* grateful! I am indeed . . . and—and some day, soon perhaps, if I can, if I only can, I will make it up to you.'

'Margot!' he cried, 'do you mean that? Is there a chance of—what do I care now? Nothing—that was all I wanted in the world!'

She knew that he had mistaken her meaning, yet she could not bring herself to undeceive him then—it would have been too cruel. For the moment she may even have felt capable of that supreme sacrifice under the overwhelming sense of obligation. She did not answer, she even let him seize her hand, though she shrank as much as ever from the mere prospect of being embraced by him. Perhaps he saw that; at all events, the dreaded embrace was spared her—he let her hand fall abruptly, and the next moment she realised that he had gone. Then, with tottering, uncertain steps, she went to intercept Lettice and the collie, trying to invent some story that should satisfy Lettice's mind on Allen's unceremonious departure.

But Allen was once more back in his fool's paradise. At last, at last he had touched her heart! She was no more proud and ungrateful, his final sacrifice had conquered her—had she not almost confessed that she might love him in time? To be loved by Margot—what a destiny for a low common fellow like him! And yet it was true, or it might be true some day. Now he could go back to his drudgery and his solitude with a light heart, he had only to be patient for a while. It was better, far better than living at Agra House, enjoying his father's favour, while Margot was far away, thinking of him, when she thought at all, with scorn and abhorrence.

So his heart was light as he turned down the familiar road to the village. There the festivities were still in full swing, broad bars of lamplight streamed from all the doors; there were small

sweetstuff and toy booths along the street, their canvas sides illuminated by flaring candles; the tap-rooms of the inns were full, and, on the green, the steam-circus was revolving with a glitter of mirrors, vermilion, and gilding, the riders, old and young, sweeping by in grinning delight on their ridiculous steeds amidst a deafening babel of organ-playing, rifle-cracking, and shouting. Hard by were the gipsy-vans, and in the cabin-like interior of one he saw a small child preparing to go to bed. The mellow lamp-light made a glory round her long hair, reminding him of Lettice. He went up to the open casement, with its neat brass rail and muslin curtains, and threw a small piece of silver (he had not many to throw away) at the feet of the astonished child.

Then he left the village and its unwonted noise and bustle behind him, and went on to the station. It was late, but he thought there might be a train to town about that time; at all events, he would go and see. He was on the down-platform trying to find a porter to answer his inquiries; a train had just come in, however, and he had to wait. As he stood there, a young man got out of a compartment and came towards him; it was Nugent Orme, whose quick eye had recognised Allen, despite all alterations. He came up and laid a hand on his shoulder. 'Chadwick!' he cried; 'so you have come home? I had no idea you were in the train!'

If Allen could have escaped recognition he would have done so; he felt too excited and exalted for any companionship just then—he wanted to be alone and think of Margot, and how she had looked and spoken just at the last. But Orme had seen him, and he could not deny his identity.

'I wasn't in it,' he said; 'I—I was going back to London, sir.' The 'sir' slipped out unconsciously; he felt his own inferiority under the gaze of Orme's penetrating but very far from unkindly grey eyes.

'You can't go back to-night, you know,' said Orme; 'the last train has gone. Come back with me to the Vicarage—we can give you a bed for the night.'

Allen hesitated, but the kindness in the other's tone touched him. 'If—if it won't be putting you out of your way, sir,' he said.

'Of course it won't; and look here, Chadwick, you can drop the "sir." I thought that was settled long ago. Come along, then—my people will be delighted to see you.' For the life of him he could not say that with quite the full accent of conviction. Allen looked a shabby and disreputable guest to bring into the Vicarage without warning. Orme felt that his mother might protest with some reason.

However, he could not feel any of the disgust and indignation which had coloured his thoughts of Allen of late. Whatever he had done, and whatever he was, he was in a state now which called only for pity and forbearance. In delicacy, Orme would have spared him even questioning just then, but he felt it important to know how Allen was situated before he could help him effectually.

So as they were going along the dark lane from the station together, he began—

‘When did you come down here, Chadwick?’ Allen told him. ‘And have you seen your father yet?’

‘No—he wasn’t at home.’

‘But surely you weren’t going away without making an attempt to see him?’

‘There’d be no use in my seeing him.’

‘Then what did you come down for?’

‘That’s my business,’ said Allen.

‘Of course it is!’ retorted Nugent rather sharply. ‘By all means keep your own counsel if you prefer to, though you might understand that I don’t ask out of idle curiosity.’

‘I came down to see—somebody,’ Allen admitted, ‘and—and I’ve seen her, and got all I wanted.’

Orme stopped, his face looked set and stern under the lamp on the footpath. ‘If that means that you’ve been at your old tricks, Chadwick, you had better say so at once, before we go another step together. Have you been trying to annoy Mar—Miss Chevening? Yes or no?’

‘I saw her, it was in the garden,’ said Allen doggedly. ‘I didn’t mean to annoy her.’

‘Perhaps not; but whether you meant it or not, what good could it do? You could only distress her! If you wish to come home, be a man, Chadwick; go to your father and speak to him—don’t skulk about the grounds frightening girls. You can stay at the Vicarage till he returns.’

‘Orme, I take my oath I never meant to skulk or—or frighten her, and you don’t understand. I—I can’t come back. . . . I’ve done what will prevent me from that!’

‘Did she tell you so?’

‘No—she wouldn’t have prevented me, only—I didn’t want to, that was all.’

Orme breathed more freely; for an instant he had been afraid that Margot had been unrelenting to this poor prodigal—had turned him from his father’s gates.

‘Look here, Chadwick,’ he said more kindly, ‘no one can help you if you won’t help yourself. You must pluck up courage and see your father. I can’t believe that he will be hard on you—you have paid dearly enough, I’m afraid, for giving way to a moment’s temptation.’

They were walking on now and had reached the first few outlying houses of the village.

‘What do you mean when you say that?’ cried Allen. ‘What do you know?’

‘My dear fellow, whatever I know you must not think I am anything but sorry for you just now.’

‘You said “temptation,”’ insisted Allen—‘temptation to what?’

‘To dishonesty—if you will have an answer.’

'Do you mean using the money the governor gave me—*gave* me, mind?'

'I do not mean that, as you know very well. I meant the theft for which you were sent away. What is the use of denying it to me, when I know everything?'

Allen's face worked violently. 'You know—you know!' he repeated in a strangled voice. 'Orme, for God's sake tell me who told you that? Was it—was it—Margot?'

'If it was,' said Orme, 'we have no secrets from one another, Chadwick—we are engaged. It is natural that she should tell me.'

'Damn her!' said Allen fiercely. 'So she told you that, did she? She! God, if I'd known that a little time ago! Orme, I've a good mind to—— No; you've been kind to me—and what's the use, what does it all matter? You'll be seeing her to-morrow, I dare say. Well, you tell her from me that I'm a low, common chap, on my road to the devil by the shortest way I can find, but I'd sooner be as I am than what *she* is—that's all. I won't trouble you with my company any longer—you're all too moral and strait-laced for the likes of me, I dare say!'

Orme was angry as well. 'If you're bent on going to the devil, go!' he said; 'I'll not try to prevent you any longer,' and he turned on his heel. By-and-by he thought the other's outburst was due to some crack-brained jealousy, and stopped undecidedly. Had he not been too hard on him? Was not an imprecation, even against Margot, pardonable under the circumstances? But Allen was out of sight: black clouds had gathered overhead effacing the moon, and heavy drops were falling in wet stars on the dust. Perhaps this made it easier to abandon Allen's reclamation as hopeless. Nugent turned in at the Vicarage, not, after all, unthankful to be alone.

The rain came down in sheets soon after he was indoors, and once more he had scruples. However, no doubt Allen had found shelter somewhere, he thought, and he was right. At that moment Allen was in a low pothouse in a back lane of the village, engaged in getting drunk with as much expedition as possible.

Some hours after the rain was still falling, but he was no longer sheltered from it; he was lying in drunken torpor under a hedge by the roadside.

So ended his expedition, and with it all the dreams and hopes that, shadowy as they were, had kept him from falling earlier into brutalising despair.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE VERGE.

Unsichtbar zuckt auch Schmerz um deinen Mund,
 Verborgne Thräne trübt des Auges Schein,
 Der stolze Busen hegt geheime Wund.—*Heine.*

ORME awoke next morning to that sense of vague dissatisfaction which most of us have known at some time. He soon traced it to its proper source—his conscience was not at ease about his treatment of Allen Chadwick. He wished too late that he had refused to let him go; he had a guilty recollection of being over ready to take him at his word.

It was this, perhaps, that kept him from mentioning that meeting when he came down to breakfast, and impelled him to ease his conscience afterwards by endeavouring to find out whether Allen was still in the village or not.

If he went to the station he might intercept him yet, and he went to begin his inquiries there. The rain had ceased, it was a grey muggy morning, the muddy roads were strewn with prematurely fallen leaves, and were beginning to steam in the slowly returning heat. Though it was mid-August still, autumn had given its first warning of decay, the cooled and moistened air was charged with its enervating melancholy.

Orme kept a sharp look-out as he walked on, but he saw no one resembling Allen on his road to the station. There he found a porter whom he questioned. Yes, the porter had seen a young fellow corresponding to the description; he had come in early that morning and sat by the fire in the porters' room, it being uncommon cold for the time of year. If the porter was asked his opinion, he would say that the young chap had spent the night out of doors, for he was wet to the skin and muddy—'well, there, he was a mask of it! But, bless you,' he continued, 'those tramps they think nothing of sleeping out in all weathers sooner than go to a workhouse, sir. This one seemed all stupid like, been on the drink heavy, and laid down in the first ditch as came 'andy. I kep' thinking, too, as I'd seen his face before, and I asked him if he didn't belong to these parts, but he said he didn't belong nowhere. And when the 7.40 up come in, he got in and went off by it. I hope you ain't missed nothing up at the Vicarage, sir? I'd ha' stopped him if I'd known, and had him searched, but he seemed harmless enough.'

'No,' said Nugent; 'it's all right, I noticed him last night and had some talk with him, that was all.'

Now that he knew that Allen had gone he felt relieved to be thus spared any further responsibility. The fellow was worthless,

'on his road,' as he had said himself, 'to the devil'; it was better, since he would not be stopped, that he should take his shame and degradation elsewhere. This last outbreak of his seemed to justify Orme in his disgust, to remove the sting of his self-reproach.

He would go and see Margot, and find out from her what purpose, if any, Allen had had in seeking her, and what had occurred. She would tell him, of course, of her own accord, and he could relieve her mind of any fear of being again molested by giving her the news of Allen's departure.

He had to wait a little while before she came down to see him, looking paler than usual. She admitted that she had had a wretched night, the storm had kept her awake—what torrents of rain! and surely there had been some thunder, had not he heard thunder? Did he get home before it began?

She talked fast and nervously, with a forced animation; he fancied that she avoided meeting his eyes, that she tried to keep the conversation upon indifferent topics. He had meant to leave it to her to make the first mention of Allen's brief reappearance, but, as she showed no intention of doing so, he was driven by a growing impatience to say, 'Has anything happened while I have been away?'

She laughed. 'My dear Nugent! you forget that you only went away on Monday, the day before yesterday! I am glad the time seems so long to you, but what *should* happen in two days—and here?'

'Then you have nothing to tell me—about yourself, I mean?'

'Do you want a full account of all my doings? I'm afraid it won't be very interesting. On Monday, Miss Momber called, just when I wanted to do my flowers, and in the afternoon I went to tea with the Eddlestone girls. On Tuesday, my step-father went away and he hasn't come back yet. Lettice and I went for a long ride in the morning and played tennis all the afternoon. In the evening—well, in the evening it rained, which you know already. That is all, Nugent. Oh, and the benefit club had its festival yesterday, and the band frightened Harebell.'

He asked no more just then; he knew from her manner that she had seen and spoken with Allen. She had her reasons for concealing what had passed; he would not give way again to the old distrust—but, oh, why could she not confide in him?

And the double consciousness of something withheld produced an embarrassment and constraint between them for the first time since their engagement.

'How stupid we both are to-day!' exclaimed Margot at last; 'it is this horrible weather, I suppose—the rain has only left the heat worse than it was. Let us go round the garden, Nugent, and see how my poor roses have suffered.'

They went round together; the gardener's boy passed wheeling a barrow containing the litter that had been made during the night, and Margot stopped and spoke to him.

'What have you got in that barrow, Tom,' she said. 'Leaves?'

'Leaves and all sorts, miss,' said Tom, putting down his barrow to touch his hat; 'had a job to clear it all up, too, miss; this is the second barrerful, got it all swept up now, miss.'

'And what do you do with it all, Tom?'

'Bonfire, miss, got it burning now in the yard.'

'Very well, Tom, you can go on,' said Margot. They were opposite the summer-house now, and Orme thought he saw her glance at it as she passed with a slight hesitation. 'Shall we sit down?' he proposed.

'There!' she said, with a little shiver. 'No, indeed. I was thinking what a hideous little place it looked, and how I should like to have it pulled down!'

Orme said nothing, but it instantly rushed to his mind that it was there that she had met Allen the night before.

'I am grateful to the rain for one thing,' she said presently, 'it has put off the picnic. Even Pussie Eddlestone quailed at the idea of having afternoon tea in a swamp, so she has written to fix to-morrow instead. I am so glad, for I don't think I could have borne it to-day. I hope I shall be better to-morrow—you will come, too, Nugent, of course? There will be plenty of room for you in the wagonette. Lettie is going in Millicent's pony-trap.'

'How will you go?' he asked.

'I shall ride, I think.'

'Then I will ride too,' he said. 'I can get a horse at the hotel stables, and we can go together.'

He fancied that her assent was not so enthusiastic as it might have been, and soon after, seeing that she was suffering still, and that her replies became more and more languid and perfunctory, he left her with a heavy heart, wishing that he could have found the courage to tell her what he knew, and yet trying to convince himself that it was his duty to be patient and await her pleasure.

By the next day, however, his mind was more at ease; he would have an opportunity of speaking to her while they were riding together, and this time he would not allow her to baffle him. He saw what the case was—that coward had been working on her sympathies, making her feel that she was the cause of his wretchedness—well, it ought not to be difficult to convince her that her pity was thrown away, her responsibility of the remotest degree.

It was a lovely afternoon—the sky a deep blue, mottled with trails of pure white, the air clear, the landscape refreshed and rejuvenated by the much-needed rain—when Orme dismounted at the steps of Agra House. Margot's mare had been brought round, and Margot herself was not long in making her appearance.

She was a sight to rejoice any eyes, to say nothing of a lover's, as she came down the steps with a smiling nod of welcome to him, and stood there caressing and talking confidentially to Harebell. And yet, when he had put her into the saddle and they were riding through the gates together, he noticed that her eyes still had that

strained look of apprehension, and that her cheeks had lost all vestige of colour. She talked gaily enough and declared herself quite recovered, but he fancied that, as before, there was an effort in her animation.

'We had better trot on,' she said after they had got clear of the village, 'or we shan't catch up the others—they started ever so long ago.'

'Is it absolutely necessary to catch them up?' objected Orme.

'They will expect it. But, of course, if you would find trotting at all inconvenient——'

'I am not afraid of falling off,' said Nugent with a laugh, 'if you mean that.'

'I only said that to tease you,' she answered, with a side-glance which spoke her approval of his appearance. 'You look rather well on a horse, do you know, Nugent? But really we ought to go on. The Holly Bank wagonette isn't even in sight yet.'

For some time they trotted on, exchanging remarks at intervals, until on a hill far in front they saw the glitter of varnished panels in the sun.

'We needn't hurry now,' said Orme, 'there's the wagonette, and, yes, that's Millicent and Lettice in the pony-carriage behind them. As long as they see us, that will do, and—and I want to tell you something, Margot.'

She checked her mare instantly. 'Wait till I have told you something first,' she said. 'I forgot it yesterday, and I know you will be interested.'

It was better that she should tell him—he felt ashamed once more to have doubted that she would do so. 'Tell me your news first,' he said.

'Ida is engaged to Guy Hotham. It was all settled at Homburg, and they will be at home in a few days now. Nugent, do you think Lady Adela will object—*could* she?'

His face fell; he had hoped that she was about to tell him something very different, but she seemed so earnest, so absorbed in the subject that he could not pass it off just then. Perhaps—it occurred to him for the first time—Allen had lied, she had not seen him, did not even know that he had been there.

At last his opportunity came. 'You don't ask me for my news,' he said, 'and yet, if you don't know it already, I think you will be a little startled. Margot, on Tuesday night I saw Allen in Gorsecombe.'

'You—saw Allen?' she repeated with bloodless lips. 'Nugent—did you speak to him, did he tell you anything—why he had come?'

'He said he had come to see you, that he had seen you in the garden. Margot, why did you keep that from me?'

'Why did I? Oh, Nugent, I've dropped my whip! Will you get it for me, please, I will hold your horse. . . . Thanks very much! And now, see Pussie is waving a handkerchief at us from the wago-

nette—they will all begin waving directly, like a school treat! We must get on, really.'

'Answer my question first,' he said; 'why did you say nothing about Allen?'

'Because it could do no good, it was not a pleasant subject to talk about.'

'That I can understand—but not why you didn't mention it to me. Surely, Margot, there should be no secrets between us now!'

'I—I tried to tell you, I could not—not at once. I—I thought you would blame me.'

'Blame you—for what?'

'It was stupid of me, wasn't it? But it made me nervous, Nugent. I never used to be nervous—but it is a little your fault. I never know how you will look at things and it frightens me!'

Orme was deeply hurt. 'I am sorry I give you that feeling,' he said coldly; 'I thought you had more confidence in me than that.' And, without another word, they rode on till they came up with the rest of the party.

'We quite thought you had had an accident,' screamed Pussio Eddlestone, 'didn't we, mamma? We were nearly sending Mr. Fanshawe back to see what had become of you. I had visions of Margot being run away with, and Mr. Orme going home on a hurdle. Now you *have* caught us up do keep with us, like good people—it makes it so much cosier!'

Whatever additional cosiness could be derived from calling out small-talk at the top of her voice and making encouraging sounds to the horses was afforded to Miss Eddlestone for the remainder of the drive. A little later they reached the place where they had arranged to picnic, a beech wood surrounding a chain of three miniature lakes, a favourite spot for such expeditions.

The Eddlestone girls bustled about, discussing the best sites, organising stick-collecting parties, and unpacking provisions with the noisiest energy; the jokes were as mild, the tea as smoky, and the discomfort as undeniable as they generally are on these occasions.

At any other time, Orme would have found enjoyment, notwithstanding, in the scene—the warm, peaceful afternoon, the bright figures grouped in the shade by the satiny grey beech trunks, and beside them the olive-green water, ringed here and there by a rising fish. But he was too oppressed to do so then, or to take more than a very half-hearted part in the general gaiety. What he had just learnt had sorely disquieted him. He did not suspect Margot, even then, but he watched her with a sad wonder as she sat there, laughing and talking with that feverish brilliancy in her eyes.

He had thought he possessed her entire confidence, that their mutual understanding was perfect—and now she had kept this harmless secret from him, out of fear. Margot, who seem so proud and fearless, afraid of him. Why? Was it his own fault? How could he repair it?

Presently Lettice came to him : 'Nugent,' she said in a whisper, 'come and help me to get some water-lilies, there are some on the other pond, quick, before the others see us ! We'll pretend we are just going for a little walk, and look quite careless about it—then they won't suspect anything. Give me your hands, I'll pull you up—oh, what a weight you are !'

Nugent let her drag him off by an elaborately circuitous path. 'Can you row ?' said Lettice. 'You can ? Then there's a boat in a little house down there—we'll get it, *do* let us.'

The rest of the party began to disperse. Mrs. Eddlestone, who was not of active habits, remaining to pack up, Mr. Fanshawe going off with Fay in search of ferns, Millicent and Dottie carrying the remains of the feast to the coachman. Pussie Eddlestone drew Margot's arm in hers and strolled round the edge of the lake. 'Hasn't it been jolly !' she said. 'Though, to be sure, we might have had a few more men. Would any one think Mr. Fanshawe was such fun, to hear him in the pulpit ? It would be nice if he took a fancy to dear Fay, wouldn't it ? By-the-by, dearest, have you settled yet, when *your* wedding is to be ? You'll let us be your bridesmaids, won't you ?'

'Nothing is settled yet, Pussie. Perhaps my wedding never will be.'

Something in the tone of the reply made good-natured, inquisitive Pussie open her eyes. 'Why, Margot, what a thing to say ! I thought you were such a happy couple ! He was looking rather glum all through tea, now I remember. Have you fallen out with one another, or what ?'

'No—no,' said Margot impatiently ; 'only one can never be sure of anything in this world ; happiness least of all !'

She was standing by one of the lakes as she said this, looking with clouded, serious eyes out to the middle of the water, where Nugent was sculling lazily about under Lettice's orders. Now he was leaning forward and talking to her, in so low a voice that the words were not carried to the bank. If he was questioning her about last night—if Lettice forgot her promise ! Well, it was Fate—she was powerless. And though she seemed to see nothing, she was conscious all the time of every detail in the scene before her. Orme's fine and rather severe face, and Lettice's eager one ; the liquid dazzle on the wet sides of the boat ; the golden-green of the beech wood, and in the background a pine-clad hill with the red trunks gleaming redder in the level sunshine.

'What makes you so awfully morbid, dear ?' said Pussie. 'If I were lovely like you, and engaged to be married to someone who adored me, I wouldn't be afraid of unhappiness coming, at least I would wait till it did come !'

'Don't envy me, Pussie. You wouldn't if you knew ! What am I saying ? You are right, I was morbid. And, after all, if one once really loves it isn't easy for anything to destroy that love, is it ?'

'Now what has anyone been telling you against Mr. Orme ?'

Don't believe it, Margot, whatever it is. Why, we've known him ever since we were children together, and besides, can't you *feel* it isn't true! What did they say, dear?'

Margot laughed a little drearily. 'How ridiculous you are. Do you think I want to be assured that Nugent is faultless? No one has ever told me anything to his discredit, and if they did—ah, I should shock you if I finished my sentence.'

Just then she would almost have welcomed the discovery of anything in him which put him on a lower level, which would lessen his right to condemn her. She felt surer of her ability to forgive him, than his to excuse her. Did he know already, and how much? If she were to tell him this very evening, as they were riding home, he might help her, counsel her what to do; on the other hand—she would risk everything. She could not foresee what view he might take, what act of reparation he might insist upon. Still, as she went back to the spot where Mrs. Eddlestone was still placidly dozing by an unpacked basket, she had almost resolved on unburdening her conscience before nightfall.

Lettie had made no perilous confidences while in the boat. Orme was incapable of inviting them, and she was mindful of her promise, from a persuasion that Allen's return was connected in some mysterious way with her silence.

So when he and Margot were on their way home, he was as unenlightened as before.

There was some delay in saddling the horses, and the vehicles were far in advance when they mounted, but this time neither showed any inclination to hurry.

'Nugent,' began Margot, 'I—I want you to tell me exactly what happened that night when you met—him.'

'Why should you wish to know?' he said. 'He is gone—he went off to London next morning, he is not likely to trouble you again . . . let us forget him.'

Her face lost some of its anxiety, but she was not entirely satisfied. 'Still, I should like to know, Nugent,' she said, bending over to take her handkerchief from the saddle-pocket. 'Tell me.'

Seeing that she would not be put off, he told her everything but Allen's parting words. Her eyes were fixed on him and he saw her face slowly assuming an expression that startled him by its suppressed tragedy.

'You told him that!' she said in a low voice. 'Oh, Nugent, what have you done—what have you done?'

'Don't look like that, dearest!' he said, 'I was wrong, I know. I only meant to prove to him that I knew the worst there was to know. If he had come back with any honest purpose he would not have resented it so, but he is a thorough scoundrel. He left me in order to go and get dead-drunk in some low tap-room. I heard that afterwards. What could anyone do to help such a fellow as that?'

Margot's face was turned away from him towards the gorgeous

western sky, with its contrasts of saffron and heather, rose and lapis lazuli, seen above the bronzed purple of the slopes across the valley. Her time had come; she must speak now; but she kept her face averted as she did so, and the words seemed forced from her by some agency stronger than herself. 'Ah, Nugent!' she cried, almost inaudibly; 'if—if he were *innocent*?'

'Innocent! I don't understand,' said Orme.

'Why won't you—without words? If he did not really steal that locket——'

'How can that be, if it is true that he was actually caught in the act? Did you not tell me so that evening at Taplow?'

'Did I say that? I ought to have said that he was found with the locket in his possession—that was true enough.'

'But you meant me to understand that he stole it, didn't you?' She made no answer—her graceful head dropped a little more.

'Which story am I to believe—that or this? Margot, do you think I hesitate for a moment? I know you too well for that. How could you imagine I could believe you capable of such cold-blooded wickedness; such mean, hateful treachery!'

'I only said *if* Allen was innocent, Nugent!' she said faintly.

'I know,' he replied, 'you spoke out of some generous impulse to shield him, to make excuses for him. You felt, very likely, that you might have done more than you did; you were touched when you saw him in that degraded, desperate state. But you didn't see—how should you? what such a defence as that involved, or you would never have hoped that I should believe it! If I once believed that Allen was innocent, I should believe much more—I could not help myself, Margot. Thank God, I am too sure of you for that! I know that if you were really convinced of his innocence, you would not have sent him away, you would not have tried to conceal his return; you could not, or you would not be Margot—not *my* Margot!'

'And—if I had done all that,' she said; 'would you hate me?'

'If you had done that,' he replied, 'I should not hate you, I suppose, even then—but I would never see you again if I could help it. I should try not to think of you, or if I did think of you it would be as one I had loved and who was dead.' She stole a look at his face as he spoke, and shuddered. His eyes were stern, the lines of his lips had grown rigid at the mere thought, the sunset touched his features with a radiance which seemed to render his face unfamiliar and almost terrible to Margot just then.

But the next moment he was smiling into her conscience-stricken face with all the old tenderness. 'See what you might have accomplished by that quixotic plea of yours!' he said. 'Luckily for me—and you too, you poor, impetuous darling—you have failed to convince me in the very least!'

Margot gave a long sigh. 'Yes—I have failed,' she said. 'I will not try again. And, Nugent, whatever I am—you *do* love me now? Tell me so again!'

There was something infinitely pathetic to him in the humility of the exquisite face that was uphfted to his own; he bent and kissed her passionately on her tremulous, proud lips; his arm was around her slender form. 'I love you,' he said. 'I love you with all my heart and soul—you cannot really doubt that, Margot? Whatever you say against yourself, I know that you are generous and true and tender-hearted. Forget all my old miserable fault-finding—your instincts were right, mine were wrong. Darling, I am not worthy of you—who would be? But at least—at least I love you!'

He released her and they rode on in silence; Margot smiling to herself in the dusk with a half bitter, half melancholy self-application of two lines from 'The Last Ride Together,'

So one day more am I deified,
Who knows but the world may end to-night?

Presently they came to a stretch of level turf. 'Nugent!' she cried; 'Harebell has been so good, and she is dying for a canter?' And before Nugent could remonstrate, she was flying over the common and he had nothing to do but follow.

'Isn't it glorious!' she said, as they pulled up some minutes later, 'I didn't think your horse would have kept up with Harebell.'

'It was not a very safe thing to do,' said Nugent. 'You couldn't possibly have seen a trench or a rabbit-hole in this light!'

She laughed a little wildly. 'Perhaps that was why I did it!' she said.

CHAPTER VI.

LITERA SCRIPTA.

- York.* Peruse this writing here, and thou shalt know
The treason that my haste forbids me show.
Aum. Remember, as thou read'st, thy promise past
I do repent me; read not my name there,
My heart is not confederate with my hand.

Rich. II. Act 5.

CHADWICK returned unexpectedly on the evening of the picnic, and Margot met him at breakfast next morning. 'So I'm to have the blessing of seeing my family around me at last!' he remarked, with one of his ugly sneers. 'Your dear mother writes me she is coming home. Returning with flying colours, too, and a prisoner of war—oh, don't look at me like that—you know all about it; I shall take care to let Lady Adela know *I've* had no hand in it. This young Hotham must be a chuckle-headed chap to be caught by Miss Ida. I ought to be a proud man—stepfather-in-law to a

future baronet! I shall hold up my head with the county-folk now. If that boy of mine hadn't turned out a good-for-nothing rogue, he might have made up to Miss Hotham and we should have been a snug family party. Ah, you may curl your lip if you like—though it doesn't come well from you, however grand you may think yourself, young lady!

'Why do you say such things to me?' the girl protested in a low voice. 'I am very far from being inclined to sneer at anyone just now.'

'Allen's beneath your notice, eh? Well, you got him turned out and you can afford to let him alone now. He's done for himself with me and gone to the bad, and I don't so much as know whether he's alive or not. I've got a set of dutiful, well brought up children, who are everything they ought to be, and one of them's going to marry into a county family—that ought to content me, I daresay. And yet, you'll think it very low and vulgar in me, very likely—but there are times when I'd rather have a boy of my own. There are times when, if that poor, shiftless scamp were to come back and say he was sorry like a man, I do believe, though I've struck him out of my will and called him all the hard names I could think of, I do believe I should be fool enough to forgive him! It's something, after all, to have a creature of one's own flesh and blood to care for one.'

'Have you ever encouraged us to show you any affection?' she said. 'You do not care for us.'

'I'm not complaining. I married with my eyes open. I dare say folks would say all the hardship was on *your* side of the house. But if I find my amusements where I can get 'em—and God knows that isn't at home!—I don't interfere with you; you have all the indulgences other girls have—dresses, parties, as good a bit of horseflesh to ride about on as any in the county, and no money spared on any of you, and all I get in return is black looks for it!'

Margot's eyes had a heartbroken look of appeal in them. 'Don't say that!' she implored him with trembling lips; 'it is not kind—it is not true . . . I *am* grateful. I do feel that you treat us well . . . I wish—I wish I deserved it!'

He had expected a very different reply, and this disconcerted him. 'I wasn't thinking so much of you,' he said lamely. 'You're the best of 'em—you and the little girl; it's Ida who puts my back up . . . Don't mind what I said, I'm out of sorts this morning. There, you've not done anything at all events. It's all right!'

This unusual kindness, rough as it was, smote Margot to the heart; it was long before she recovered from the effect of that interview; she was nervous, afraid of herself all day. She was even glad that she had promised to spend that evening at the Vicarage, her fear of being alone again with Nugent was nothing to her dread of another *tête-à-tête* with her stepfather.

She felt almost happy at the Vicarage; there was something comforting in being treated with all that admiring affection, even

though she knew that it might pass away only too soon. Margot was more irresistible than usual that evening, pathetically grateful for the most trifling kindness, docile and subdued, to a degree that won Mrs. Orme's complete approval. 'I must say,' she remarked to Millicent in the drawing-room after dinner, 'being engaged has had an excellent effect on Margot, she is *so* improved—so much more gentle than she was!'

'Much,' agreed Millicent, but she said it with a little sigh. 'I wish she looked a little happier,' she was thinking; 'is she finding out that she has made a mistake in her feeling for Nugent? I wonder if she is telling him so now out there, poor fellow, and he loves her so dearly! Why could she not have left him alone?'

Millicent wronged her. Just then, Margot, as she paced the lawn with Nugent in the mystical green light, had never loved him more, never felt so intense a satisfaction in the consciousness of being beloved. She said but little herself, no more than was sufficient to draw forth stronger and tenderer assurances of all she was to him than he had ever spoken yet. She needed them all; they gave her strength and courage; in spite of his words yesterday, she began to hope that this power she possessed over him, making his strong voice tremble with repressed passion, would survive any disclosure she might make. She would be herself still, unchanged but for one thing; could he leave her, and never see her face again, as he had said? Then she remembered that, for far less cause, he had been ready to withdraw from her before—why imperil her whole happiness now by revealing what there might even yet be no necessity that he should ever know?

No, she could not; the present hour was sweet, she would enjoy it; if it was not to last, she would have it afterwards to look back upon—this last evening with Nugent in the shadowy garden, with the scent of late Mary lilies and stocks in the air, and all forms and foliage confused and softened in a mellow haze.

Yet, though she could not decide to tell him, she was equally unable to keep away altogether from the dangerous topic, as though she sought yet for some favourable opening, or wished to commit him to some self-contradiction.

'Why do you doubt me like this, darling?' he said at last. 'Why can't you believe once for all that nothing you could do would alter my love?—it *is* so!'

'*Nothing*, Nugent? When you said yesterday that, if I had sent Allen away knowing he was innocent, you would—leave me!'

'*If* you had done so, yes. I was safe in answering that, because I know perfectly well that that is just one of the things you simply could *not* do. Margot, can't you forgive me yet for mistrusting you before! I *did* distrust you, to my eternal shame, but that was before I knew you as I do now, and even then, I never once thought or could have thought you a traitress.'

'Oh, and I was not—indeed I was not!' she cried.

No,' he said. 'I think you are too proud for that. So you

must not persist in supposing yourself guilty of these imaginary crimes, and asking me what I should do; or you will end by believing in them yourself. I don't want to be too hard on that poor fellow, but, from your own account, he could not be innocent, you could not even believe, to say nothing of knowing, he was so under the circumstances. He may come back and reproach you as much as he likes—though I should not advise him to do it if I am near—but the responsibility for what he is now is not on you. I have told you all this before, and now I have seen him myself and heard of his later proceedings, I feel even more certain than I did that he was an irreclaimable scamp, and that in insisting on his leaving you did only what you were perfectly justified in doing. So you must think no more about it. Are you cold out here, darling? No? I thought that was unlikely on such a magnificent night. How splendid the moon looks between those two cedar boughs! What a curious shape, too—that tilted oval!’

‘Yes,’ said Margot; ‘it looks like a cold shining death-mask hung up there.’

‘Not a particularly cheerful simile. You are almost as bad as Heine’s philosopher friend, who said the stars were only a brilliant eruption on the face of Heaven!’

‘Did he?’ said Margot absently; ‘how unpleasant of him—but it is rather ghostly out here, Nugent, don’t you think? Let us go back to the drawing-room, and I will sing to you, if you are good.’

They found Mrs. Orme reading a letter which had just been delivered. ‘Oh, Margot,’ she began, ‘perhaps *you* can tell me what I ought to do about this? I’ve just had a letter from a Mrs. Melladew, who says she used to be Mrs. Chadwick’s governess. She wants to know if she may use my name as a reference—she is taking pupils and very anxious to be recommended. I should have thought she would write to your mother. I know nothing about her, except that she accompanied songs sometimes at our Penny Readings. So far as I remember she played with some taste and correctness.’

‘She did not behave very well about leaving,’ said Margot. ‘I suppose that was why she did not like to ask mother to recommend her—and of course,’ she added, ‘she will be glad to have your name. She *did* teach the piano very well. I think you might safely do what she asks.’

‘I look upon giving a reference as a very serious thing,’ said the Vicar’s wife importantly; ‘a very serious thing indeed. I could not recommend her at this distance of time without having a personal interview and finding out what she intends to teach and how far she is qualified to do so. I shall write and tell her that, if she likes to come down and see me, I will let her know, after I have put a few questions, how far I can conscientiously allow my name to be used. Yes, that will be far the best way. I don’t suppose she will really come all the way from town, and I shall feel I have done all that can be done.’

She sat down to her writing-table to carry out this design, whereupon Nugent claimed the fulfilment of Margot's promise. She went to the piano, and he sat near, where he could watch her face as she sang. She had chosen that daintiest and tenderest of modern love-songs—'The Devout Lover,' possibly with a sad prevision of its future irony. She had only sung one verse, when the Vicarage maidservant entered: 'There's a young person outside,' she said to her mistress, 'who wants to speak to Mr. Nugent.'

'She must mean the Vicar,' said Mrs. Orme, turning round from her letter; 'it can't be *you*, Nugent. Say the Vicar is away at a parish meeting, and won't be back till late, will you, Ellen?'

'The young person said most particular, please ma'am, that it was Mr. Nugent she wished to see.'

'Oh,' said Nugent; 'I'd better go and see what it is, mother; I shan't be a moment.'

He rose and went out.

'It's Miss Margot's maid, sir,' said Ellen. 'She didn't wish it mentioned in there. I've shown her into the study.'

In some wonder as to what this young woman could possibly want with him, Nugent entered his father's room. There, at one side of the Vicar's table, with its litter of parish accounts, sermon paper, and divinity books, sat Susan, nervously twisting the long ends of her mantle. 'I hope I've not taken a liberty, sir,' she began; 'but there's things as can't be said on the house-tops—and I should be glad of the favour of your advice.'

'Really,' said Nugent, 'I am not qualified to advise you. I think my father—unless,' he added, 'it's any legal trouble you're in?'

'It's nothing of that sort, thank you, sir. I've come to you, knowing that you used to be a good friend to Mr. Allen when he was living at home.'

Orme sat down. 'Well?' he said.

'Perhaps you wasn't aware, sir, that he was back here the other night?'

'I am quite aware of that, he has gone away again—what of it?'

'I don't know if Miss Margot mentioned that she had a talk with him while he was here.'

'Miss Chevening mentioned that, too—naturally,' said Orme. For an instant the girl's face fell unmistakably, but only for an instant.

'You see, sir,' she continued, 'what I should like your advice upon is this: I never was so set against Mr. Allen as some people. I always said it was a case of give a dog a bad name; and when he was sent away to Injia on a sudden, I had a feeling it was all on account of something he was thought to have done, though it was kept very quiet—even us servants didn't know nothing for certain. And it wasn't till only the other day as I found out what that something really was. Mr. Allen was sent away for stealing joolery

belonging to Miss Margot—which he no more done, sir, than what I did myself, and I can prove every word I say !’

‘I am very glad to hear it, and so I am sure will Miss Chevening be—if you *can* prove it, there’s no reason for any hesitation that I can see.’

Susan’s eyes glittered. ‘That’s what you say now, sir,’ she said; ‘but I’ve myself to think of. I’d like to see Mr. Allen righted, but if it’s to cost me my place——’

‘If you are afraid of your master, I will undertake to see it done without bringing you into the matter—that is, if you have any real proof, your mere word is nothing, I need not tell you, in a case like this.’

‘Thank you sir, I’m sure. I *have* got a proof beyond my words, or I shouldn’t be here. And I want you to promise as you’ll lay it before Mr. Chadwick yourself, which is more than I durst do myself!’

‘I will tell you when I have seen it. First of all—what is it, and where is it?’

‘I’ve got it wrapped up in my dolman, sir; and I’d like to tell you, before I let you see it, how it came into my hands, and then you’ll see why I’m not putting myself forward beyond what I can help. Mr. Allen asked me to get Miss Margot to come down to the summer-house and speak to him, which she done, for I see her set out.’

Orme began to feel uncomfortable; he did not know why, for he had already guessed that the meeting took place in that particular spot: perhaps it was a certain suppressed tigerishness in this woman’s expression, a conviction of coming triumph, that he did not like.

While this conversation was going on, Margot had been softly finishing the song in the drawing-room opposite, he heard the last line dying away as he sat there, waiting for Susan to proceed,

‘And worship her in distant reverence.’

Susan was still hesitating, probably editing and revising her proposed revelations.

‘If you happened to overhear what passed at that interview,’ said Nugent, ‘you may spare yourself the trouble of saying anything more—because I shall not listen.’

She flushed with indignant virtue. ‘I should scorn such actions,’ she said; ‘it was—it was the day after, and I was walking round the grounds after tea, when I see some scraps of paper on the floor of the summer-house. I thought I knew the writing, and it was a pity to leave it laying about where it might be read, so I picked them all up, and something made me piece ’em together like, just to see if they made sense. When I read it, there—you might have knocked me down with a feather! It was as clear as daylight as Mr. Allen was as innocent as a child! . . . Sir, Mr. Nugent, let me go on—let me tell you how it was, if you’re truly his friend it’s

your bounden duty to hear me out—that letter was written, asking, begging, and praying of him to take that locket out of Miss Margot's drawer and——'

'Give me the letter,' said Nugent.

'If I do, sir, you won't let Miss Margot get hold of it? You see, if she tore it up once, she'll as likely as not burn it next time she——'

'Miss Margot burn a letter! What in God's name are you talking about? What do you mean by talking this impertinence—to me?'

'Of course I can't expect you to believe *my* word, sir; though I ought to know her writing by this time—but here's the letter to speak for itself. I've pasted it together on foreign paper, as you may see.'

'*Her* letter!' cried Orme, falling back, deadly white, in his chair. 'Do you think if I had known that I would have heard you so far—do you think I will read a line of it after this? It is a damned forgery, this letter of yours, do you hear!'

'I hear you, sir, and I'm not surprised at your taking on, even to bringing yourself to use such language to me. But if it's a forgery, I should have thought that was all the more reason for looking at it. I'm sure I've no interest one way or the other, as your own sense ought to tell you.'

Nugent turned upon her. 'I don't believe you,' he said; 'you *have* an interest; you have not come here to ask advice, you have made up your mind what to do already—hold your tongue, and put that precious paper in your pocket again! You have some devilish scheme of your own in all this; you may really believe you have got hold of something that compromises Miss Chevening, or you may be acting with a confederate for all I know. Listen to me, will you! I say you can make what use of that letter you like, so far as I or Miss Chevening are concerned. If you are acting under any other person's orders, let me warn you to take care what you do. Before you take any steps, think whether you may not find that you have ruined yourself without injuring Miss Chevening, which seems to be your main object. Conspiracy is an ugly thing to meddle with, remember. You say you want my advice—now you have it.'

'Then you won't even look at the letter, sir?'

'Am I to tell you that twice? Leave the house, and, before you decide to go on with this, count the consequences—that is all I have to say to you. You have been warned.'

Susan rose; she was pale, too, for she was more than a little shaken by the contemptuous rage she had provoked, and disconcerted as well by his insight into her motives; and yet, as he could not help noticing, she had not the bearing of a detected impostor. She was chagrined, spiteful, but not abject; he could not think she disbelieved in the genuineness of her evidence, or that she was in collusion with any other.

'I'm going, sir,' she said. 'I respect myself too much to notice the things you've thought fit to say. Whether you believe me or not, all I want is to see justice done, and if you won't help me, I must go through with it single-handed, that's all about it. And I might have known beforehand, if I hadn't been a fool, that it wasn't likely as you'd be anxious to see Mr. Allen righted *now*—it's natural you shouldn't, under the circumstances.'

'If a man were to say that to me,' said Nugent, 'I wouldn't answer for what I might do to him. As it is, you will go out of this house without another word!'

He rose and opened the door with such an expression that even Susan's feminine desire for the last word was quelled into silence, and she passed out, with her nose high in the air, it is true, but a heart that was secretly quaking.

'I wish *I'd* a young man as would stand up for me like that through thick and thin,' she was reflecting, on her homeward way; 'that baker wouldn't—no, nor yet that young rip of a Barchard, for all the gentleman he thought himself! But Mr. Nugent will have it out with her, for all that. I've stopped her singing for a while, that's one comfort; she'll be on her knees to me next, and then it will be my turn!'

Orme dropped into his chair again, trying to think. With a shock of absolute terror he found himself yielding once more to doubts of Margot, and this time more hideous than any that Millicent had instilled. The flaws that had seemed fatal then to his love, now seemed venial by comparison. And yet—she had vindicated herself before, she would do so again. But he must know, he must ask, already the glow of indignant incredulity had died away; he was beginning against his will to remember, to compare, to balance probabilities. Only Margot could save him from this hell of doubt—and he could bear it no longer.

He went to the drawing-room, where she was still sitting with his mother and sister. Not daring to advance out of the shadow, he said, in as ordinary a voice as he could command, 'Margot, will you come into the study for a moment? I want your opinion about something.'

She followed him, with some smiling remark to Millicent in passing. He closed the study door upon them. 'What a wretched light to show anything by!' observed Margot, as she saw the one candle flickering in the draught from the open window. 'What is this wonderful object I am to admire, Nugent?'

He stood there by the book-cases, looking at her in her brilliant young beauty. What folly to believe that that sweet, stately innocence of hers had anything to conceal!

'An excuse to get you alone,' he said. 'Margot, I have just seen somebody who told me a very strange story.'

She looked strange and startled, with the light flickering over her face. 'A story!' she repeated. 'About what, Nugent?'

'About a letter that was written long ago—written and destroyed.'

She caught the window-curtain at her side, as if to save herself from falling. 'Ah!' she cried, 'I know now . . . it was Allen! He has come back to do this.—Oh, the coward; the coward! Nugent, you must not believe it—you *will* not?'

'Why should you think it was Allen?' he said. 'It was not Allen, Margot, it was someone who hates you at least as bitterly—your own maid, Susan.'

'Susan! And you listened to what she chose to tell you against me! Is that your trust, Nugent?'

'Don't reproach me till you have heard. She came to me with a story that Allen was innocent; that he was induced to take that locket by a letter making certain representations. I did not at first understand that you were personally concerned. I refuse to believe now that you knew of its existence. I trust you . . . only, if you love me, Margot, let me hear you say so yourself!'

'There is no such letter,' she said defiantly. 'You have been deceived by a wicked girl. There is no such letter, Nugent. There cannot be!'

'Thank God!' he said, under his breath. 'I was sure of it, darling. I knew it was an infamous slander. I was so sure that I would not look at the letter that woman tried to show me.'

Her grasp on the curtain tightened. 'Susan tried to *show* you a letter!' she said faintly. 'What letter, Nugent?'

'*The* letter. The letter which, according to her, brought about Allen's disgrace.'

'Did she tell you how it came into her hands?'

'The account she gave was that she picked it up in pieces by the summer-house in your grounds the evening after you saw Allen. Not a very probable story, is it? If you remember, we saw them clearing up the paths that morning.'

'She—she might have gone there early—before they began.'

'Then do you mean that she told the truth? *Was* there a letter? Was it torn up? If so, by whom?'

'Nugent, how *can* I tell? You ask so many questions.'

'You know nothing about it?'

'Have I not said so?—But these pieces, Nugent; these pieces—what did she mean to do with them? Why did she bring them to you?'

'She had pasted them together; she pretended that she was afraid to show it to your step-father herself, and wished me to do so.'

'And she left the letter with you? Where is it, Nugent?'

'I told you I refused to take it. She left declaring that she would do without my help. Good Heavens! Margot, what is the matter?—What have I said?'

She was clinging to his arm, looking up into his face with wild, beautiful eyes! 'Nugent,' she said in a strained whisper, 'she

means to show it to *him*—she hates me so . . . I know it now . . . she will do anything to injure me. And, Nugent, she must not—do you hear?—She *must* be stopped! oh, say you will help me to get that letter back!’

He put her from him and held her by her wrists, so that he could see her face. ‘Tell me the truth,’ he said sternly. ‘You *did* know of that letter?’ Her hands writhed in his in the effort to free themselves and cover her shrinking face.

‘Have pity on me, Nugent. Don’t make me tell you!’ she murmured.

He let her go abruptly. ‘You need not tell me,’ he said. ‘I know now, and you thought *I* would help you to keep this secret? You knew and said nothing, would have said nothing—but for this!’

She had fallen into the chair occupied by her enemy a few minutes ago, and was making piteous efforts to collect her thoughts, to make her defence.

‘I would have spoken soon,’ she said; ‘when I was able—indeed, indeed I meant to . . . Nugent! don’t you believe me?’

‘No,’ he said, ‘I don’t. I can’t. When I think of all you have told me, all lies—deliberate, unscrupulous lies—all that poor fellow has suffered; how I was led to side against him, drive him back to his despair, and you always silent, uncaring, except when you mentioned him with a lofty pity—my God! Margot, you have deceived me for the last time . . . I will never believe a word you say again!’

‘I knew this would come,’ she said, speaking like one in a trance. ‘I said so—that first evening of all, on the balcony—do you remember? I knew you would be a hard judge. You always were a little hard to me. And just now in the garden, while you were telling me how dear I was, I knew, I knew! You are right, I suppose. I always told you I was not good. I have been wicked, hard, unjust—now I am punished for it. All I can do now, Nugent, is—to set you free. . . . This is the end of everything between us!’

‘Yes,’ he said; ‘it is the end. But, Margot, there is more to do yet. You will do what little can be done to undo this wrong. You will tell your step-father everything now—this very evening? Surely there is no time to lose.’

‘*She* may tell him!’ said Margot. ‘I cannot and will not say anything.’

‘I will go with you,’ he urged. ‘I will stand by you—it is the one way I can serve you now. Margot, don’t leave this accusation to be brought by your worst enemy! Even now you may gain your pardon by confessing. Can you leave Allen under this disgrace an hour longer?’

‘My stepfather would think my repentance came a little late,’ she answered with a frozen smile. ‘I shall confess nothing. If I can persuade that girl to be silent even for a little while, I shall.

You see—I am desperate. If you are anxious to rescue Allen, denounce me yourself, Nugent!’

‘You know I could not!’ he said—‘not unless I was certain that the truth would never come out otherwise. Then, Margot, I would. As surely as there’s a heaven above, I would speak—rather than let such wrong go on; yes, if I had to kill myself afterwards! See, I give you a week. I shall stay here during that time, much as I would give to go away. If by the end of the week Allen’s father does not know of his innocence—I will tell him myself.’

‘What an heroic determination!’ she said, with the ghost of her old mockery; ‘but I think you will be spared such a painful necessity. It is something at least to know what you propose doing. I have two enemies now, it seems!’

He made a gesture of despair; at the moment he did very nearly hate her.

‘You taunt me,’ he said; ‘but—God help me!—what am I to do? Your enemy I can never be, whatever you have done and are—I have loved you too well for that. But that shall not make me your accomplice!’

‘Have I asked you to be? Yes, I remember—I did . . . that was before. Now I ask nothing. I will go on alone—act as I think best. We are not enemies—we are not friends, only two people who have loved and found each other out in time.’

As she spoke these last words Millicent suddenly entered. ‘Why, you disgracefully selfish persons!’ she began lightly, ‘are you aware that you have left us alone all the evening and that mamma has gone off to bed? . . . Nugent! . . . Margot!’ she broke off, looking from one to the other; ‘is—is anything wrong?’

‘Nothing, dear Millicent,’ said Margot, with a laugh that had a heartbreak in it, ‘except that Nugent and I have discovered that we are unsuited to make one another happy, and have been telling each other so.’

‘I know who made that discovery!’ replied Millicent indignantly. ‘Margot, you have no heart; you cannot value love when it is yours—you do not deserve that it should be wasted on you! Why is beauty given to people like you, I wonder?’

‘I don’t know indeed—for their more perfect happiness, perhaps? And, forgive me, Millicent, but I have really been reproached this evening as much as is good—even for me. So if you will let me have my things, I will go home.’

‘You are not coming with me?’ she said with lifted eyebrows, as she found Nugent preparing to accompany her.

Yes,’ he replied shortly. ‘I can’t let you go back alone. Margot, you won’t insist on that!’

‘I only insist on one thing,’ she said; ‘that if you do come you will not speak to me; I want to be left in peace—if there is any peace for me anywhere now!’

And they went back to Agra House together without a word, each conscious of the shadow that walked between them in the silence.

CHAPTER VII

GAINING TIME

Als treulos muss er verachten
Die eigne Herzliebte sein
Als schimpflich muss er betrachten
Die eigne Liebespein.—*Heine.*

Oh, my Sweet,

Think and be sorry you did this thing!—*Browning.*

AT the door of Agra House, Margot spoke for the first time since they left the Vicarage, and her words seemed the result of a deliberation arrived at during that silent walk.

'You are not going to leave Gorsecombe yet?' she began.

'I told you I should not,' he replied gravely, 'until ——'

'Until you have satisfied yourself that I am humiliated enough!' she struck in with a momentary flash. 'Very well; but till that desirable end is reached, is it necessary that the whole village should know that we have decided to separate?'

'Not if you think otherwise,' he said. 'Millicent will say nothing till you wish.'

'If you must stay here—and I know you cannot trust me out of your supervision—let us keep up pretences as long as we can. Oh, it will be ghastly, I know, but, I—I will make it as easy as I can for you—it will not be so bad as having all Gorsecombe speculating about us to our faces, will it? We need only be seen walking together occasionally; if we are a little silent, they will put it down to perfect happiness and understanding!'

The muscles in his face were twitching with repressed suffering as he answered her. 'I will do what you please, only—you talk of making it easy for me, Margot—if you are going to speak to me as you did just now, it will be more than I can bear!'

'Ah, but I am not. You must remember that it is hard for me too—it is a difficult situation just at first, between a girl who hates me and a man who only despises me. What I said was not quite in good taste, very likely. I shall get used to it all in time. By to-morrow, I daresay, you will find me a safe companion. That is, always supposing that Susan has not already set you free to depart. There, you can leave me for to-night at all events.'

His heart was wrung by the impulse to plead with her once more, to beg her to have pity on herself and on him, to cast away this cynical hardness of hers and own some sorrow for the great wrong she had committed, some willingness to make reparation.

But he felt intimidated by those imperious eyes, and the haughty curve of her full lip; he could not move her, he felt weak enough even still to dread being moved by her, and so the words he had almost uttered, died unspoken, and he turned away into the darkness, to wrestle with his agony as he might.

Miss Chevening, still in the same state of unnatural composure, passed into the hall, and, contrary to her usual custom, looked into the study to bid good-night to her step-father, whose manner satisfied her that her secret was safe as yet. Then she went up to her room and rang for Susan.

Presently Susan appeared, demurely observant. 'Are you ready for me, Miss?' she inquired, as if nothing had happened to affect their relations.

'I hear,' said Margot calmly, 'you have been taking the trouble to play the spy upon me, Susan. I want to know how you came to find that letter.'

'Well, Miss, if you must know, I haven't been satisfied in my own mind about the way you treated Mr. Allen from the first. And when I knew as you and him was going to have an interview in the summer-house, I thought it was only right there should be some third party present, to see fair play like. So I made free to slip round by a backway through the shrubbery, and stood up behind the arbour.'

'And then, I suppose, you heard all that passed between us?'

'I made the most of my opportunities, miss, certingly; and I don't deceive you. I heard quite enough to show me what had been going on. Then, as soon as it was safe to come out, I came—and there was the letter all tore to bits, which spoke for itself. And with all respect to you, miss, that letter I mean to keep till I have a chance of laying it before one who has the best right to see it!'

Margot's eyes lightened; if a wish could have killed, Susan would never have left that room alive, but it was necessary to keep calm, not to let this girl see that she could affect her in any way.

'What is your price?—for I suppose that is what you are coming to,' she said.

'My price, miss? Really I beg your pardon, but I don't understand.'

'You do understand—you understand very well. What will you take to give up that letter? You had better be moderate. I—I am not very rich; still I have some money. Remember, no one else is likely to buy your wares.'

'You're making a mistake, miss,' said Susan. 'I may be a poor servant girl, but I have my ideas of right and wrong for all that. No money that you nor yet no one else, if it was the Queen herself, was to offer would make me part with that letter, except to the proper quarter. I'm not to be tempted, miss, so you may make up your mind to that.'

What might have been a genuine burst of honest indignation

was spoiled by the malignity that was apparent in every word; yet Margot quailed and felt rebuked for the moment.

'You must hate me very much, Susan,' she said in a low voice. 'I wonder why.'

'If I hate you,' was the reply, 'which I don't say whether I do or don't, I've reason enough for it. You think because you're good-looking, you're everybody and everything. You'll have to be taught that right's right and wrong's wrong for you the same as everybody else. Who are you and your family, I'd like to know, that master's only son should be made to seem a thief and turned out to beg or starve to keep you from disgrace? If he's fool enough to let himself be plotted against and turned round your finger, I'm not, and I'll see justice done before many hours are over, I can tell you, miss, whether you like it or not, if you went on your knees to me to make me shut my mouth!'

'That I shall certainly not do,' said Margot. 'You are a bad girl, and you are doing this, not because you love justice, or even money, but because you hate me. I can see that, and I am not foolish enough to try to soften you. But I suppose even though you do hate me, you are not quite blind to your own interests, when you need not sacrifice the one to the other, so I am going to propose a bargain. I do not wish this to be known just yet—not till my mother is here, which will be in two or three days at the furthest. For every day that passes before Mr. Chadwick knows the truth, I will give you ten shillings—you see, that leaves you perfectly free to turn informer when you chose, only you can enjoy your revenge a little longer and earn money by it at the same time. If you refuse, you will be stupid, but that is your own affair.'

She might have been discussing some question of toilette, so calm was her manner, though her hands were twisting convulsively in her lap. But her voice and her eyes were full of an indomitable spirit and a consummate disdain which had some effect even upon Susan, though avarice had a greater.

'I can try it, Miss, for a day or two, and see how it works,' she said, with more respect. 'I'm sure it's not my wish to make things more unpleasant than need be—'

'That will do,' said Miss Chevening. 'You can go. I don't want you near me any longer.'

When Susan had got out of the room she realised that her triumph had lacked completeness after all. She had not had the satisfaction of seeing her young mistress at her feet; she had not even wrung any appeal for mercy from those proud lips—which naturally increased her hate. Still, she would see her low enough before long, and in the meantime, there was no harm in getting what she could, in case the more substantial reward she hoped for should prove illusory.

Margot did not see Nugent the next day; but the day after that she met him coming out of the Vicarage. 'You have not kept your promise,' she said; 'but perhaps you were on your way to me?'

'I tried yesterday,' he said, 'and I—I could not—it was too much . . . so soon!'

'Let us begin our penance now, then—not that *you* have committed any sin. We *must*, Nugent. Miss Momber is looking at us over her window-blinds. If we separate here, it will arouse her suspicions at once—you owe so much to me!'

'I have promised my mother to meet Mrs. Melladew at the station and bring her back to lunch,' he said, in a constrained voice. He was looking worn and haggard, as if he had not slept much of late.

'Mrs. Melladew!' exclaimed Margot, and a new light, almost a hope, shone in her eyes. 'I had forgotten. Nugent, let me come with you. I must see her alone—you will let me, will you not?'

'Of course,' he said drearily, and they walked towards the Station Road together, silent—for what could he say to her, or she to him that was not better unsaid now? She dreaded him as an embodied conscience; he saw beneath the fair and seductive mask a prodigy of unscrupulous, impenitent selfishness, and each read the other's thoughts. Only once he spoke, 'Has that woman acted yet?' he asked.

'Not yet. I think I have persuaded her to give me a little longer.'

'You are wrong to leave it to her to speak.'

'You have the remedy in your own hands.'

'I hope,' he said; 'I hope to heaven you will not drive me to use it!'

'I cannot answer for what you may think fit to do, of course.'

That was all that passed between them, except that now and then they met persons they knew, a jovial country gentleman on his cob, or a well-meaning farmer or village-wife, who little guessed how *mal à propos* were their jokes and compliments. On the platform, while they were waiting for the train, Nugent spoke again. 'Tell me only this, Margot, why are you so anxious to see this Mrs. Melladew just now, and alone?'

She turned her head away. 'I will tell you nothing—nothing any more,' she said; 'what is the use?'

'Does she know anything about—that letter?'

'Perhaps. It is enough, or ought to be enough, that I wish to see her. If you have any regard for me left at all, you will help me, not hinder me.'

The train came in and Mrs. Melladew—a much older and more careworn looking person than the sentimental, flighty-headed Camilla of old—got out of it. As she recognised Margot, she seemed confused, uncertain what to do, but the girl met her with a cool decision.

'Camilla, I heard you were coming, and I persuaded Mr. Orme to bring me to meet you. I have something to say to you in private—let us walk a little way down this lane, and Mr. Orme will wait here till we come back.'

Nugent waited with such patience as he could command. It seemed an endless time before they returned, but at length he saw them coming down the lane.

Margot seemed to be pleading, retracting, extenuating something she had said. Mrs. Melladew was flushed and trembling with indignation; she went straight to where he stood.

'Mr. Orme,' she began excitedly, 'before I go with you to the Vicarage I want to know this: has Miss Chevening dared to tell you that I—?'

'Camilla, stop!' said Margot, interposing with pale face and burning hazel eyes. 'Control yourself. I have not said a word—indeed I have not! I—I made a mistake. I beg your pardon—what more can I do?'

'I assure you, Mrs. Melladew, that I have not been told anything. If you will allow me I would rather remain in ignorance of your conversation,' said Orme stiffly.

'Yes, yes,' said Margot eagerly. 'Pray, Camilla, pray let us forget it!'

'You never liked me!' returned Mrs. Melladew, on the verge of tears, 'and now—when goodness knows I find it hard enough to make a living!—you try to take away my character, to make me own to things I never did—no, nor dreamed of doing! I had no reason for getting rid of that poor young man—why should I?'

'I accuse you of nothing,' put in Margot. 'Why will you be so unreasonable? Have I not owned I was wrong?'

'Ah, you are afraid—you dare not face me out! Look at her, Mr. Orme; don't trust her, she is false and wicked—she would do anything to save her pride, and once I used to wish myself in her place. I would not be now for anything in the world.'

'You are only telling Mr. Orme what he knows already,' said Miss Chevening.

'Mrs. Melladew,' Orme broke in, 'don't let us make this scene more painful than it is already. I—I have been obliged to hear lately many things that—that have changed my life. I wish to know no more. Let us forget this, and let me take you up to the vicarage.'

'No,' she said; 'I can't now. I have been too much upset. Tell Mrs. Orme anything you please, that I missed my train, if you like. I will write and fix another day, but now I will go back at once.'

A train was just coming in, and she was able to carry out her intention, neither of the other two dissuading her. 'Margot,' she said, as they went towards the station, 'I always felt I behaved badly to poor dear Ida, in deceiving and leaving her as I did. My only excuse is that I was in love—foolishly in love. But you at least cannot reproach me. No, I won't shake hands with you. I hope I shall never see or hear of you again—you are a wicked and dangerous girl, but you will be punished some day. I think you *must* be punished already!'

Orme heard this, and also saw the effect it had upon Margot, who stood there without attempting to reply, looking miserable and even humiliated enough, but unrepentant still. Yet if her offence had been anything less, his heart would have softened to her then—that look of lonely, half-defiant misery only seemed to make her lovelier. Again he wondered how hardness and deceit could put on so fair an outside, that even now, when he saw her as she was, desperately striving to put off exposure by the most reckless and hopeless expedients—even now all her charm had not perished for him.

When they were alone together, he said earnestly, ‘Can’t you see that it is hopeless—that you are only injuring yourself by what you are doing?’

‘Nugent,’ she answered, ‘don’t preach. If I choose to injure myself, that does not concern you any more. I will not admit that it is hopeless—not yet.’

‘It is hopeless—even if you had gained your object (I do not ask to know what it was) with Mrs. Melladew, even if you could bribe that girl Susan to spare you, you will not silence me, Margot. The wrong you have made Allen bear shall not go on, that I swear. His father must and shall be told the truth.’

She turned upon him—her eyes ablaze with anger. ‘Do you mean that you will break your word, and tell him now? Nugent, if you do, I shall hate you. I very nearly hate you now, when you are so righteous and bitter against me; but if you do that, I shall *quite* hate you!’

‘I am not in the habit of breaking my word,’ he said coldly. ‘I promised to wait. I wish—if you knew how I wish!—that you may save me from an odious duty; but when the time is up, if you have not spoken, I will speak. I cannot help it if that makes me hateful to you.’

‘It is only time that I want,’ she said more gently; ‘only time. I cannot—no, Nugent, I cannot go to my step-father myself. Oh!’ and she lifted her face to him with a sudden impulsive appeal that was well-nigh irresistible, ‘if I was to tell you what excuses there are for me; why I acted as—as I have acted; what I fear now would you forgive me, Nugent? Would you think better of me? If I could only believe that, I would try once more!’

‘You made excuses to me before,’ he said, ‘and they were false. I believed them then; I was too ready to believe when it was you who spoke. You drove that poor fellow from his home, you prevented him from coming back, you would have kept his innocence a secret even now if you could, you are still scheming to avoid acknowledging the truth. Nothing you can say will alter or excuse that even if—’

‘Even if you believed it,’ she continued for him. ‘Yes, I see, Nugent, it is really all over. I saw it in your face that evening, and then I resolved that it would be useless to try to move you. Why did I forget just now! Yes, you have lost faith in me, nothing

will ever bring that back again. I have failed and I deserve to fail. Now let us part. I thought I could bear being with you, but the strain is too heavy for me, people must think what they like! I will not see you again until—until you come to do your duty in exposing me, unless I send for you first, and then, for the sake of old times, Nugent, you will not refuse to come to me. Leave me here to go on alone—it is better for us both!’

He stood aside, and watched her as she passed on along the road, her step as light and graceful as ever, her head proudly erect, much as he had seen her on the Trouville *plage* on just such an August day as this two years ago, before he had ever spoken to her or seen her face.

And now he wished with all his soul that he and she had never met, that he had been spared the mockery of a love, happiness, and faith which endured so brief a space and had such an ending as this.

* * * * *

The days passed on somehow. Mrs. Chadwick was taking her homeward journey by easy stages, without having indicated, perhaps intentionally, any place on her route to which letters might be addressed. On Margot the dreaded blow had not fallen as yet, thanks to the piece of gold which Susan found every night upon her mistress's dressing-table, and which was accepted without comment on either side. Chadwick was surly at his wife's repeated delays, but nursed his wrath, in company with the spirit-decanter, till her return. Margot had to go on playing her part, to disarm the curiosity of the neighbours, at tennis parties, or at church, to bear herself as if she were not oppressed at all times by a terrible dread of what was happening at home. Often, in sheer despair, she was tempted to reveal all she knew, but the consequences appalled her. At last, the precariousness of her position became grimly familiar, she even forgot it at times—had she not, she would have gone mad. It is possible enough that Damocles himself began to recognise some flavour in the viands before the last course had been served.

And now her suspense was nearly at its natural end. To-morrow was the day which Nugent had fixed as the limit of his silence: that very morning Mrs. Chadwick had telegraphed from Paris that she expected to arrive, with Ida, Guy, and Reggie, at Agra House late in the evening.

Margot was sitting in the great drawing-room with Lettice, whose gleeful impatience planted the last thorn in her sister's heart, waiting for the travellers to arrive; the carriage had already gone down to meet them, every sound from the front of the house seemed to be its returning wheels.

They had come at last. Lettice had run out to greet them. Margot, sick and faint, stood a moment in the room, irresolute, before following her into the hall.

Her mother did not see her at first, she was too busy in giving

directions and asking questions in the intervals of kissing Lettice, who had thrown herself into her arms.

'Why, Lettie, you look quite a different child; all the pretty roses back again! I knew you would get well here sooner than at Homburg; and mother hasn't forgotten you, darling! The brown portmanteau and bag to go into the blue room, Masterman, please, and be careful with my trunks. Guy, dear, this is not Hawleigh, you know, but we will try to make you comfortable here. Margot, you quite frightened me, coming out like a ghost. How are you, sweet one? We thought of you in Paris—*such* a crossing! No, not that one; that's Miss Ida's. Where's Susan? Tell her to come instantly. Is papa in his study? Then I'll pop in and see him before I go up to my room.'

Her cheerful airy satisfaction and high good-humour, which even embraced her husband just then, struck Margot as in ghastly contrast with the danger that threatened.

'Margot,' complained Ida, pouting, 'you might say something to Guy; you might *look* as if you were glad to see us back again!'

There was something almost fierce in the elder sister's caress. 'Glad!' she cried. 'Oh, if you knew how I have wanted you! And—and Ida, dear, I do hope and pray that you and Guy will——' she could not finish her sentence.

'That we shall be happy?' said Guy, as he wrung Margot's hand, looking very happy and handsome just then. 'No doubt about it, so far as I'm concerned, and she's learning to make the best of a stupid sort of fellow like me!'

'Oh, Guy!' protested Ida. 'I am very, *very* happy, Margot,' she whispered; 'so happy that I feel as if it couldn't last. Do you ever feel like that about Nugent?'

Margot did not reply, but her expression showed Ida that some hidden and terrible grief had entered into her sister's life since they had met last. 'Forgive me, darling, I didn't know,' she added hastily, 'You will tell me about it upstairs—won't you?'

'Yes, yes!' said Margot. 'There—there are several things I must say, Ida, when we are alone.'

Reggie, in all the importance of travelled boyhood, was enlarging to Lettice on his Continental experiences. 'It was jolly at that Homburg hotel, I can tell you, Lettie,' he informed her. 'I dined table-d'hôte every night—it didn't begin till your bedtime. And the Prince of Wales was there part of the time; I capped him when we met, just as I would one of the masters, you know, and he capped me. I don't think much of Germans, though; they sell beastly sweets. I like Paris. Guy bought me a stunning box of soldiers there—cavalry charging. Guy's a brick. It was rough in the steamer. Mother and Ida were ill, and even Guy wouldn't answer any questions properly. I wasn't ill in the least. A French lady said I was a regular little English sailor—it was more than *she* was, but she was better just then.'

'Did you have equi-noxious gales, Reggie?' asked Lettice, much impressed.

'There were gales all the way,' he said. 'They might have been those for all I know; you would have been sick if you had been there, I can tell you. How's old Yarrow?'

Mrs. Chadwick meanwhile had burst upon her husband. 'Well, Joshua, here we are back again. I hardly thought I *could* have come on from town to-night, we had such a terribly rough passage; but I made the effort. I felt I oughtn't to stay away a day longer than I could help. I felt that so very strongly!'

'Did you?' he returned. 'It has taken you a devil of a time to feel it, that's all I can say. Well, you're back now, and it will be my fault if you get the chance again for some little while. There are some bills I shall want some explanation of from you, Mrs. Chadwick, when you've got over the effects of your journey.'

'Joshua!' she exclaimed, rather piteously. 'I have been away all this time, and you begin about bills the moment I come home. For goodness' sake, let us try to do without quarrelling for a little while—Guy Hotham is here.'

'What do I care for Guy Hotham, or Guy anybody?' he said. 'You've hooked him for your Ida—whether you can keep him on the hook is your look-out, not mine. What's he doing here? Why couldn't he go on to Hawleigh?'

'Because it is too long a drive so late at night,' she replied. 'Joshua, it can't hurt you to be civil to him, particularly as Lady Adela has really taken his engagement better than I expected; she has asked Ida to stay at Hawleigh next month. Really you might, on this very first night of all, try to take things a little more pleasantly, when they are going so well too!'

'I'm not going to use violence to the young man, am I? Keep him out of my way, that's all I ask. I don't want your swell friends here with their cursed haw-haw ways, treating me as if I was my own butler. There, go and take off your things and have some supper—it's laid out in the dining-room—and don't let anybody come in here and bother me, that's all I ask of you.'

She was not sorry to escape, and invent some pretext for preventing any one, Guy in particular, from encountering her husband that evening, as his condition was obvious enough. But even this did not damp her spirits very greatly, and at supper she was very much the most cheerful of the party.

At length Ida rose, declaring she could not keep awake any longer, and Margot accompanied her. At the door of her room, Ida offered to say good-night, but Margot declined to accept the hint. 'I am coming in with you for a few minutes, dear,' she said gravely.

'But I am really so awfully sleepy, Margot!' protested Ida, yawning to give effect to her words. 'Won't what you have to tell me wait till to-morrow?'

'No,' said Margot; 'it has waited too long already.'

Ida yielded rather pettishly, evidently without suspecting the nature of Margot's communication, and fearing, weary as she was with travelling, to be bored by demands on her sympathy for her sister's trials.

'Well,' she said, 'come in, then, but you must not stay more than five minutes, or I shall fall asleep in the middle of it.'

The two sisters were together for a much longer time than five minutes that night, but in the course of the interview Ida heard that which effectually removed all tendency to drowsiness.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COURAGE OF DESPAIR.

IF Margot found the suspense almost beyond her power to endure, it was not less terrible to Nugent Orme. Perhaps it was even more so, for she did occasionally succeed in shaking off the oppression of it—he, never. Millicent was still the only person at the Vicarage who knew that their engagement was at an end, and she was ignorant of the real cause, which he could not bring himself to tell her. Her great love for him inspired her with an unaccustomed tact in treating what she recognised as a sorrow which could bear no speech as yet. She summoned all her ingenuity to prevent her father and mother from noticing that anything was amiss, devising pretexts which should enable Nugent to be away for the greater part of every day without exciting their remark, and shielding him in countless ways when he was with them.

This, the Vicar's easy-going indolence, which made him rarely observant of anything that was not forced upon his notice, and his wife's absorption in parish work, rendered easy enough. Millicent abstained from all questioning of her brother, notwithstanding a natural desire to know whether the determination to part had come from him or Margot. At first, she had regarded Margot as a heartless flirt, who had chosen to captivate Nugent from sheer love of admiration, and dismissed him as soon as she was weary of his devotion, but that was only at first, and now, when reflection had made her almost certain that Nugent had discovered something that justified her own charge against Miss Chevening, she felt no triumph. Her original distrust of Margot had given way; when the intimacy between them had been renewed, she had been unable to resist the fascination of her beautiful friend, and whatever fault she had committed, she pitied, and would have been sincerely rejoiced to find excuses for her.

But Nugent evidently saw none, and had no hope of doing so; all her efforts to see Margot were repulsed; she could only wait and try to comfort herself with the thought that the disillusion, if it was to come, had not come too late,

What Nugent suffered he chose to suffer alone, and as the dreaded day drew nearer, and still there was no sign that Margot repented or intended to make any act of reparation, his mental torture grew more acute.

He shrank with loathing from the odious duty that might soon devolve upon him; he had pledged himself in a certain event to make disclosures which must expose the woman he loved to disgrace. Why had he done so? How much easier to hold aloof, to leave Allen's rehabilitation to fate or chance! But if Margot would not speak, if she succeeded in silencing any one who was able to denounce her, then Allen must surely be doomed to sink into lower depths from which it would be too late to rescue him—even now the horrible injustice of which he was the victim might be irremediable.

To be silent for the sake of sparing Margot's feelings would be conniving at a moral, if not an actual murder. He had not the right to spare her, and yet—oh, God, if something might intervene at the eleventh hour to save him from taking action!

It seemed that his prayer was not to be granted; the morning came of the day which, before it closed, would decide whether he was equal or not to the task he had set himself. He would delay acting to the latest possible moment, do nothing till evening, and then he would go up to Agra Hoose, and if Chadwick had not learnt the truth by that time, nothing should prevent him from speaking.

So he had decided as he sat under the cedar, feeling chilled to the marrow, though the sun was blazing down on the lawn, when he saw Guy Hotham coming towards him through the open window. He had already heard overnight of the return, and as he went to meet him now, he saw from Guy's untroubled countenance and the heartiness of his greeting that nothing of a painful nature had occurred as yet.

'Awfully glad to see you again, old fellow!' began Guy. 'You're looking rather seedy, though; you've been sticking to that beastly Lincoln's Inn too long. Well, you mustn't be in a hurry to get back just yet awhile, that's all. Of course you've heard it's all right about Ida and me? . . . thanks, I knew you'd be pleased about it. I do think I'm the luckiest beggar in the whole world—the Mater's come round, got a letter in Paris, asking Ida over to Hawleigh—that was old Aunt Julia! So we are going to be brothers-in-law after all—that reminds me, I've a note for you from Margot somewhere. Ah, here it is!' Orme hurriedly read the note, which contained only these words: 'I want to see you alone, at once; you will find me at the small gate.—Margot.'

He went back at once with Guy, who was overflowing with high spirits and eager to return to see Ida. 'I haven't seen her since last night,' he said, 'she's rather knocked up by the journey and didn't come down to breakfast—she's not strong, poor little girl, but she'll be down by this time, I daresay. Here we are at the

gate, and there's Margot herself waiting for you—hope you're flattered! I'll go round the other way, eh? "fellow-feeling" now, you know. Good-bye till lunch.'

Orme advanced to meet Margot alone: her eyes looked very large and bright as she stood there, her lips were parted, one of her beautiful hands was pressed closely against her side, the other was dry and burning as he took it. She tried in vain to speak.

'You have sent for me, Margot,' he said. 'Is it known yet?'

She shook her head: 'You said you would speak to him yourself,' she faltered, with difficulty. 'Did you *mean* that, Nugent?'

His heart hardened against her. 'I did,' he answered, 'I intend to speak to-night, if I must. Don't try to persuade me against it—it will be no good, Margot.'

'I *want* you to speak,' she said, 'that is why I sent for you. I want you to go and tell him—*now*!'

When a man has strung himself to undergo a certain ordeal, any modification in the conditions which he has pictured to himself for it beforehand is apt to increase his reluctance. Orme had imagined the scene as taking place some hours later, with the dusk to serve as a screen between Chadwick and himself. To go through it in broad daylight, within the next few minutes, was more than he felt prepared for just then.

'Must it be now?' he said.

'At once,' she repeated impetuously, 'that girl is growing suspicious, she will wait no longer. If it must come, I—I would rather it came from you.'

'Is there no other way?' he cried. 'Margot—it sounds like empty extravagance, but it is true that I would rather die here this instant than be the means of bringing this upon you—tell me you believe that!'

She smiled sadly, a little bitterly. 'I do believe it,' she said, 'you are following what you consider your duty—what *is* your duty. I don't blame you. I even wish you to do it—only for God's sake, do it now; let me know the worst at once. He is in his study, alone—go to him there!'

'Think first,' he urged her; 'cannot you find courage to tell him yourself? You know that I say this for your own sake, not mine. I will go with you, help you, protect you if that is necessary—but indeed it will be better for you to accuse yourself.'

She covered her face with her hands for a moment. 'I—I cannot,' she said. 'I have not strength enough for that. I will come with you. I meant to do that—if you will let me . . . you shall stand between him and me, but more than that—no, Nugent, you must not ask too much of me!'

'Come then,' he said, 'and God help us both, Margot!'

They passed through the cool fragrant hall; at the door of Chadwick's study she faltered for the first time, and he feared she was about to faint, but she thrust back his arm with a blind gesture of refusal, and they went in.

Chadwick was reading an Indian journal, which now formed his sole literature; a glass of brandy and soda stood at his elbow, the windows of the room were closed, and the air was heavy with recent cigar smoke. Margot sank down in a window-seat, looking out on the trim lawn and the ribbon-planted beds, over which yellow butterflies were gaily fluttering.

'Well, Orme,' said Chadwick, who did not seem to be in one of his dangerous moods just then, 'you haven't honoured us by looking in much lately. I don't know if that's the way courting is done nowadays, but when *I* was a young man—however, if Miss Margot there don't object, it's not for me to say a word. Take a seat, man, it fidgets me to see you standing there like that. This paper here, "The Bengal Planter," says indigo's looking up again; if that fool of an Allen had been out there now, he might be making lacs and lacs, doubling the value of the concern—ah, well, the young scoundrel chose to throw away all his opportunities, and he's paying for his folly somewhere, I hope! I've done with him long ago. I don't know why I should talk of him now—it isn't because he's anything to *me* any more!'

'Mr. Chadwick,' began Nugent, 'Margot and I have come in to tell you something—something it is necessary that you should be told.'

'Phew!' exclaimed Chadwick, with a long whistle; 'what, have you made up your minds to be married at once then? Well, you must settle that with my wife. *I'm* nobody here, you know!' Notwithstanding, he was clearly pleased at being consulted.

'Oh, no—no!' cried Margot from the window-seat. 'It is not that—oh, Nugent, make him understand!'

'I see,' said Chadwick, 'it's the other way, eh? Fallen out, have you? There, again, it's no use coming to me about it—I can't make it up between you!'

'Wait till you have heard what we have to tell, it is nothing of that kind. It is something very painful to say, and to hear, something which Margot has had on her mind for a long time and can bear no longer. I am here to speak for her; you can see that she is in no condition to speak for herself.'

'Go on, sir,' said Chadwick, 'I'm listening to you, though I'm d—d if I know what's coming.'

'Her secret is connected with your son Allen. You sent him away from home under the belief that he had attempted a robbery. He was perfectly innocent of any idea of robbery. What he did was in consequence of instructions he had received.'

'Do you know what you're saying, sir? You're implying that I have been fool enough to believe my son a scoundrel, when—when he was nothing of the kind; at my age, and with my own son too! Why, if I believed that—but I see through it. I'm too old a hand to be taken in that way. It's a dodge of the pair of you to get me to forgive that boy. Now you listen to me: if you know where he is, you can tell him that if he likes to come to me and own up

like a man, I may have something to say to him—but you'll never get round me by any d—d trumped-up cock and bull stories which a child wouldn't swallow, you tell him that! . . . Who is it now,—Susan, eh? Well, get what you came for and go away; don't you see we're engaged, woman?'

'I beg your pardon, sir, I'm sure, but if you're engaged in talking about Mr. Allen, you may find it to your advantage to hear what I've got to say first,' said Susan respectfully, as she stood just inside the study. 'I think you're more likely to hear the truth from me than from some parties that could be named.'

'Stop, sir!' said Nugent. 'Let this woman tell her story afterwards, when you have heard us; you will find the two accounts agree.'

'Shall I? I'm not so sure of that!' returned Chadwick, with a muddled kind of cunning. 'If I did, it would only prove you were all of a tale and wouldn't alter my opinion. But I mean to put a few quiet questions to her before I go any farther. Now, you Susan, what have you been put up to say about Mr. Allen, eh? Out with it.'

'I haven't been put up to say nothing, sir; and there's two now standing in this room would have been glad enough to shut my mouth if I'd been willing, but willing I was not.'

'Don't, Nugent, don't!' said Margot disdainfully, as he was about to make some indignant protest; 'let her go on, what does it matter now?'

'It may be news to you, sir,' continued Susan, now secure of a hearing, 'that Mr. Allen was back here not many nights ago, in this very garden.'

'I thought as much!' said Chadwick; 'so that was how you came to hatch up this whitewashing story of yours?' he added, turning to Margot, who was powerless to reply.

'In course, sir,' said Susan, 'I don't know what Miss Margot may have told you, or what she hasn't. P'raps she told you how she sent him away, saying she couldn't do nothing to clear him, and it warn't not safe to go near you just then? P'raps she mentioned about his bringing out an old letter of hers, telling him how he was to go to her room and take out her locket, and sell it, and send the money to her, and about her tearing up the letter, and daring him to do his worst?'

'I did not!' cried Margot. 'Nugent, you will not believe that? Ah, my God, you do, you do!'

'Considering that I picked up these very pieces a few minutes after,' said Susan, 'Mr. Nugent would be hard put to it *not* to believe it, though he did pretend to when I came to him and asked him to speak up for Mr. Allen. Yes, sir, I've had to act all by myself, for I knew as no one else wasn't likely to. Poor Mr. Allen, sir, has been made a scapegoat of by them as should have known better, and as wouldn't have spoke now—and how far they meant to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, that I leave to their own

hearts and consciences to say—but not a word would ha' passed their lips, true or false, but for knowing I had evidence, and the will to use it. I don't expect no thanks, beyond seeing Mr. Allen given back his rightful place, and her as drove him out and kep' him out known for what she is, and here's the evidence, sir, which I leave it to you to judge whether I'm telling you lies or not!' And Susan brought out the fatal letter from under her apron, smoothed it carefully out, and placed it before Chadwick. 'It's got a little rubbed, sir,' she said apologetically, 'and the paste shows in places, but you can make out the writing all the same.'

Chadwick sat in a sort of stupor; the satisfaction he had felt with his own acuteness had vanished long since, his brain, drugged and bemused by constant excesses, was still grappling with these new and scarcely conceivable ideas that had been so rudely presented to it.

'Very well,' he said at length, fixing his glowing eyes on the girl, 'you've told your story—now you can go, do you hear? Be quick about it!'

Unwilling as Susan was, she had to obey, and when she had closed the door, Chadwick, with hands that trembled from other causes than drink, took up the letter, and read it slowly, while Margot, as she sat there, felt as if her heart must burst if the intolerable strain were to be much longer continued.

At last he looked up, his face purple and congested with the anger he was striving to keep down sufficiently to remain articulate. 'So,' he said to Margot, 'I've been tricked into turning against my own boy, have I? The only child I had of my own—and it was your doing! You took advantage of his being a fool, and used him as your catspaw—or, as likely as not, sent him this precious letter as a trap to get him out of your way! You kept him quiet to the very end, you found ways of shutting his mouth; but that wasn't enough for you, you weren't contented till he was out of the house. You told me in this very room—God! I can hear you now—that it was "better that he should go." Better! ah, and you knew *why* it was better! And he and I went up to London together, and all the time I was with him, there was I treating him like a dog, and he never let on, never said a word to show me what I was doing. But he ran away; I don't wonder at it, poor devil! And when he came back,' Chadwick continued, almost choking now with rage, 'when he came back, *that* did not please your ladyship, so you cheated, and lied, and fooled him into going off again to starve and rot in the gutter for all you cared! You thought when the letter was once torn up it would tell no tales, and you went on as calm and haughty as ever, lecturing me on my goings on, and ruling the house, as if you were its guardian angel, instead of what you are. Why, even the poor ignorant coolie girls out where I've been, if they could understand what you'd done, would spit in your face. And now, when the game's up, you come in, quite cool and collected, and tell me just as little as you safely

can, and think that will end the matter ! As for you, sir,' he added turning round on Orme, 'I don't know what you think of yourself, but I know very well what *I* think of you : you've lent yourself to all this, you've done your best to hush up a——'

Here Margot rose and came forward unsteadily. 'Say what you choose to me,' she said, 'it is just . . . but you insult Nugent when you join him with me. He knew nothing till a few days ago. Ever since he did know, he has never left off urging me to tell you all, and I—I could not till now, when I was too late.'

'Too late ! Yes, you are too late to better your own case. If I was wrong about Orme, I am sorry ; it's something to know you haven't succeeded in making a fool of *him* at all events. Now mark what I say, I'll take good care that all your fine friends in the county shall hear what you are, and what you are not ashamed to do ; if they like to associate with you after that, they're a less particular set than I take them for. But I want to know more about it before I go any further. If Orme hasn't been with you in this, who *has* ? Who put it into your head to ruin that boy ? Was your mother at the bottom of it ? Answer me, for I'll find out somehow, and, if she was, I'll make her repent it, by Heaven I will !'

Margot threw out her hands in passionate protest. 'Mother !' she cried, 'why do you suspect her of being so wicked, what has she done to be accused of this ? She knew nothing, no more than you did ; she knows nothing still. Oh, you *must* believe that, it is the simple truth. Must I tell you again and again that—that there is only one person you have the right to punish, and that person is I !'

As she ceased speaking, the library door opened once more and Guy appeared. 'Not interrupting you, I hope ?' he said briskly. 'I thought Ida might be in here, perhaps ?'

'No, Guy, no,' said Margot, 'she is not down yet, she is unwell, and—and we are engaged . . . please, *please* go away !'

'Here, Hotham, don't you go !' Chadwick called out, with a savage laugh, 'you've a right to know all about it, now you're one of the family ; come in, and shut the door. I should be glad of your opinion.' Guy came in, his cheery face suddenly growing troubled.

'I don't know if you'll recollect a boy of mine that used to be hanging about ?' Chadwick resumed ; 'a rough ungentlemanly cub he was, *you* wouldn't notice him most likely ?'

'I remember your son, sir, perfectly,' said Guy. 'He went out to India some time ago, didn't he ; no bad news of him, I hope ?'

'I sent him out to India because I found him out in what I believed was downright theft. I've just discovered that, as it happened, he was as honest as the day all the time, and there was someone else who knew it at the time, a woman too, and could have saved him by a word, but she had an axe of her own to grind and she said nothing—she let him go. What should you think of a woman who could do a thing like that, now ?'

'Think?' said Guy. 'What any man would think. It was one of the servants, then—the girl, I suppose, I saw coming out of this room just now?'

'That's you aristocrats all over!' said Chadwick. 'If a dirty action's done, of course it must be one of the lower classes who did it! Well-bred, handsome ladies and gentlemen couldn't possibly do anything shabby. But, however it may surprise you, it wasn't Susan or any low housemaid or servant at all. Ask Margot there to tell you who it was!'

Guy half turned to Margot, who suddenly hid her face. 'Good God!' he said in a low voice, 'is it possible?'

'Ah! it's strange, isn't it, but possible—just barely possible, as you see. Look at her, Hotham, that is the young lady to whom you will be related some day, that is, if this doesn't alter your plans, as I expect it will when you've heard the whole story.'

Guy had never had a very hearty liking for Margot, whom he suspected, unjustly enough, of looking down upon him. But as he saw her there, bowed down under her shame and her stepfather's coarse abuse, his chivalry was roused and he could feel only lenient.

'I don't know quite what Miss Chevening has done,' he said haughtily, 'or whether I should blame her if I heard the whole story, but, however bad it might be, it could not possibly affect me, as far as Ida is concerned. I shall marry Ida, and not her family.'

Margot caught his hand in eager gratitude. 'Guy!' she cried, 'I knew you would say that, but God bless you for saying so . . . God bless you for not turning against her, because of me! And indeed she would not deserve it, and it would break her heart, for she loves you very dearly, Guy!'

'There!' he said, feeling greatly embarrassed by the scene and anxious to escape from it, 'don't be afraid, Margot, I—I'm not that sort of fellow, and I daresay,' he added awkwardly, 'there's a mistake somewhere. I'd better leave you to clear it up, I think!' And he got out of the room with an evident desire to know no more.

'Clear it up?' said Chadwick, when he had gone. 'It shall be cleared up with a vengeance; it's something to find that even your beloved swells do draw the line somewhere. What are you made of, I wonder, to stand there as straight and proud as ever, when you ought to be grovelling on the ground for shame, you stubborn, false-faced she-devil——!'

Orme had been standing apart all this time, not daring to interfere lest he should excite Chadwick still further against his step-daughter. And in his heart he felt that this fury was justifiable, that Margot's insensibility to the full baseness of her conduct almost deserved this brutal awakening, but now he could stand no more.

'That will do, sir,' he said; 'you have said enough in all conscience. Margot, let me take you away, there is no reason why we should stay here any longer.'

She submitted to be led out of the room and into the hall, like a child. She sat for a moment on one of the couches there and closed her eyes.

'Nugent,' she said faintly, 'how you must despise me!'

Orme was very pale. Was it not true? Had he not indeed despised her—and yet the hopelessness of her grief touched his heart so powerfully then that the love he had thought dead stirred, if faintly. He knelt by the couch, and took her hand.

'Margot!' he said, 'don't say such things—don't think them. I cannot leave you here. . . . I can't give you up—do what I will! Let me take care of you still, dear. . . . Give me the right to take you away out of all this!'

She put him gently aside as she rose. 'It was good of you to offer that,' she said, 'but—ah! Nugent, do you think I cannot see that it was pity that made you say it? Don't protest—you know, and I know, that your love can never be what it once was. And anything less I could not bear—pity and forbearance least of all! No, it is over for both of us—it ended that night. Your standard is too high for me . . . if I could alter your judgment of me in some respects, there would still be things you could never really pardon, that would make perfect confidence between us impossible always. I would rather be alone all my days than endure the knowledge that my husband could never honour nor trust me in his heart. See, Nugent, I set you free . . . it is my wish to be free myself . . . so we will say good-bye here for the last time of all, and you must try to think kindly of me, as I shall of you always!'

He saw that her decision was irrevocable; perhaps even felt the truth of her words, while something in her manner as much as her words told him that a change had taken place in her feelings towards him. Yet it was not relief that he felt then—only a bitter realisation, now that he had lost her, of all that she was, would ever be to him. 'Is it really too late?' he said impetuously, 'Margot, take time to think, before deciding . . . surely we need one another too much to part!'

'I need no one any more,' she said. 'I have decided, Nugent. Good-bye.'

'Since it must be, then,' he answered, and there, at the foot of the staircase, they parted, calmly on both sides now that parting was seen to be inevitable.

Nugent went home to the Vicarage, too exhausted and stunned by all he had gone through to be capable of any acute emotion. In a few words he told Millicent what had happened, and that afternoon, feeling that he could bear Gorescombe no longer, he went up to London.

CHAPTER IX.

MARGOT GOES TO MAKE AMENDS.

CHADWICK had not attempted to prevent or follow Margot's retreat. As if he felt a rebuke in Orme's remonstrance, he looked on in silence as the two quitted the room. He regretted his burst of passion; even now, he could not storm at his step-daughter without that instant sense of inferiority. Abuse, after all, was a poor revenge—he must find more ingenious methods than that; now he had the whip hand over this disdainful girl, the lash must be applied with all the science at his command.

His first idea had been to turn her out of the house, as she had caused Allen to be turned out, but this again was unsatisfactory. He wanted her at hand, to assure himself of her disgrace, and to be able to turn the weapon in the wound from time to time, to watch her sinking slowly under the burden of her expiation.

Chadwick was no fool, and if drink had dulled his brain in some respects, it heightened and inflamed its capacity for working mischief. 'By God, I've got it!' he cried, after reflecting for some minutes, and then he rang the bell. 'Tell your mistress I want to see her,' he said; he was quite calm now.

Mrs. Chadwick appeared, still in total ignorance of what had occurred, and her husband, in a few terse, bitter sentences, put her in possession of the whole story of her daughter's duplicity and cowardice. The poor woman was at first utterly incredulous, but at length, when unable to resist longer, she began to protest her own innocence and feebly lament her child's misconduct. 'If I had guessed what was going on,' she declared, 'I should never, never have permitted it! Even as it was, I felt it was a pity poor Allen should have to go, though I did not like to question your judgment. But Margot always has taken her own way from a child; she never treated me as a mother. I was not told a word—not a single word! You see, Joshua, I don't take her part now—I am ashamed that a daughter of mine should have acted so—so disgracefully. I could disown her, I am so deeply annoyed. Joshua, you believe me, don't you? You don't—you don't connect *me* with this?'

'No,' said Chadwick, 'don't you be alarmed, Selina, I don't suspect you. Margot wouldn't be as clever as I take her to be if she'd chosen you for a confederate. The question now is—what's to be done with her? and I've been thinking it over, and I've come to a conclusion which I think will meet the case. So if you'll go and find her and bring her in to me—she'd better come, tell her—I can settle what her punishment is to be.'

After a short delay, his wife returned with Margot. 'I've brought this wicked girl to hear your decision; she is resigned to any punish-

ment you think proper to inflict—all I *do* ask, Joshua, is that you will not expose her publicly.'

'Well,' he replied, 'as she's so sensitive when it's her own character that's concerned, I suppose I must make allowances for her. If I did what was just, I should send her away and let the whole county know why. But I want my boy Allen back. I don't believe he'd have let himself be treated as he was if he hadn't had a soft place in his heart as well as his head, and it's likely enough he won't come back at all if he knows his dear, loving, tender-hearted step-sister isn't to be here. The first thing to be done is to find that boy, and that I'll do; it's only a question of a little money, he'll be back in a few days from now. And then—and then, young lady,' he continued with a gleam of malignity in his blood-tinged eyes, 'we shall have an opportunity of testing your penitence. Your old lover has cast you off—I could see that well enough just now. If my boy is willing, after the way you've treated him, to marry you, marry him you shall, or take the consequences!'

Suddenly as this *bizarre* idea had been conceived, he became more and more enamoured of it. He knew Margot's aversion to Allen would render such a bond between them the most exquisite conceivable punishment to her; in its coarse materiality he considered the mere possession of such a wife should satisfy Allen. It was nothing to him that neither her character nor her tastes made it probable that such a union would be a happy one. Allen must manage her, break her proud spirit; if he did not know how to do that with the advantages he would have, he would be a fool indeed, and, in any case, the young fellow would have a wife whom many would envy him.

'Margot,' cried her mother, desperately anxious to smooth things over, 'you hear what your father is—is so generous as to propose? It is really more—much more—than you deserve. Tell your father that you are willing to be Allen's wife, if he desires it . . . it is the very least you can do—now!'

Margot glanced wildly round; the horror of this unlooked-for announcement almost deprived her of power to think. She felt abandoned in this extremity. Nugent was no longer at her side, she herself had sent him away, and her mother seemed to see nothing hideous and unnatural in this proposition. Must she yield? Ah! no, anything sooner than that; and all at once her face became calm and resolved—she had decided what to do.

'I—I want time to consider,' she said, very low, 'let me have till this evening?'

'Don't be too long about it, then—or *I* may consider too. This evening you'll be good enough to come and inform me what you are pleased to decide.'

'You will know before that,' she replied, 'whether from me or not.' And slowly, like one walking in sleep, she glided out of the room.

Chadwick spent the afternoon in drawing up advertisements

intended to catch Allen's eye, and writing letter after letter to detectives and private inquiry agents, dashing them off in feverish haste, and then destroying them as unsatisfactory for various reasons.

'Pah!' he said, after composing one of these documents for the twentieth time. 'Why do I worry myself like this, when the chances are I can find out where he is at once? It's a thousand to one that girl Margot knows! Why the devil didn't I think of that before? I've lost a whole afternoon over this! I believe I'm going off my head with the excitement of it all. I'll go and get this out of Margot now—or, stay, I'll send Selina.'

His wife, after departing to obtain this information, came back into the study with a troubled expression.

'Well,' inquired Chadwick, 'where does she say he is?'

'I think she must be asleep, Joshua. I knocked several times, but I could not make her hear, or get any answer. It is better not to disturb her just yet, perhaps.'

'I'll give her another hour,' he said, 'not a minute more.'

Towards evening he could wait no longer. 'She'll listen when I knock,' he said, 'I'll have no more of this d——d sulking. I'm going myself.'

His wife followed him upstairs and along the corridor to Margot's room; the children, vaguely conscious of some disturbance in the air, left their tea in the schoolroom and crept up, too, at a distance. Guy himself, who had been hanging about all day in moody indecision, uncertain whether he ought not to leave the house, and yet unwilling to do so without having seen Ida once more, followed too.

Mrs. Chadwick knocked first, or rather tapped softly. 'Margot, dearest, it is I—mother, you will let mother in! I want to speak to you!' But there was no answer.

'Joshua,' she faltered, 'I—I don't like this . . . if I could only see into the room, but it's all dark . . . she—she may have fainted!'

'I'll soon bring her out of that!' answered Chadwick brutally. 'Margot—do you hear me?' he shouted, 'I've had enough of this folly—open the door, I say!'

And he hammered and thundered on the panels with his heavy fists, while Lettice and Reggie began to cry.

'Stop that, will you!' cried their stepfather savagely, 'how can I hear your sister speak in this din? there's nothing to cry about.' And again he thundered at the door, and again there was only silence within.

Another person had joined the group in the corridor; it was Ida, who, pale and dishevelled, with a loose wrapper thrown over her, had stolen out of her room.

'Guy,' she said, 'oh, never mind me, I am better—quite well—What is it, Guy, Who is this they are trying to awake . . . not—*not Margot?*'

'I—I think it is,' said Guy, trying to speak cheerily, 'it's nothing, Ida; go back to your room, or you'll be ill again.'

But Ida refused to move; she stood there, watching her step-father with a fascinated horror in her eyes.

'Margot,' said Chadwick, his voice thick with passion, 'if you don't open this door directly—by heaven I'll break it in!'

Then Ida rushed forward with a cry: 'Don't speak to her like that!' she cried, 'you will be sorry! . . . Can't you understand? She cannot hear you any more—she will *never* open . . . she is lying there, dead! I am sure of it. Oh, Margot, Margot!'

'Don't talk such cursed nonsense!' said Chadwick hoarsely, though he had turned ghastly pale; 'she's shamming, or sulking. I'll soon see which.'

In another minute he fetched one of the fire-irons from the opposite room. 'Stand away!' he said, and after a few violent blows the panel fell out shattered, but the *portière* before the door inside still hid the interior of the room, and no one had courage for a moment to withdraw it.

The door, which was locked, and from which the key had apparently fallen, as it was not in the key-hole, had been shaken by the blows and soon yielded. Then Chadwick flung it back and went in, while the others held their breath in awful expectation.

He glanced round the dainty room, first in evident fear, then with a reaction of relief and anger combined.

'She's made fools of us all!' he said; 'there's not a sign of her here—she's got away!'

Ida, who had been cowering back in a corner with hidden eyes and a face the colour of chalk, burst into a wild laugh at this. 'She's got away! you can't catch her; you can't hurt her now!' she cried; and violent hysterics followed which made it necessary to carry her back into her own room.

Margot had escaped, and her flight had been easily and simply accomplished. She had collected all her few valuables, and, waiting till the hour when the servants were all at dinner, had gone out, drawing the *portière*, locking the door behind her, and carrying away the key. Then stealing down by the back staircase, she had gained the stables, where Yarrow came out of his kennel with a rattle of his chain and a long affectionate whine—there was no one else to see her, and, not daring to stop, she passed on and gained a by-road that, by a somewhat circuitous route would, she knew, bring her out by the village of Puddock's End, through which the rail passed, for she feared to be recognised by some of the Gorsecombe officials, if she went to the station there.

And so an hour and a half later, tired and dusty, she stood on the platform at Puddock's End, waiting for the train which, as she had calculated, she was just in time to catch. There were very few there, and if some of them remembered her as the young lady they had seen driving or riding about Gorsecombe, it was only to wonder

at the eccentricity of gentlefolk in taking a long walk in the heat and dust when they had other means of locomotion, for there is no one more puzzled by voluntary pedestrianism than the average peasant.

The London train came up, and, as the carriages rolled by, Margot saw with a spasm of the heart Nugent's face at one of the windows. He did not see her, and she had only a momentary glimpse of his profile, but that showed her a set and stricken face, which had grown older and sterner since the day, only a week ago, when they had ridden together.

She got into an empty compartment as far away as she could, and, when the train moved off, set herself, as she gazed with eyes that saw nothing on the flitting landscape, to think out her future course.

She had fled, never to return; no force, no persuasion should make her marry Allen. The idea revived her dislike and repulsion almost as strongly as if he had won no claims to her gratitude. His claims?—ah! how she hated them; how she writhed under the sense of them; how, in the hard bitterness of her soul just then, she hated him that he had shown himself the worthier! Yet, though she was fleeing from him, she was on her way to him. That was the first object for which she had escaped; she owed him amends, and she would pay him by bringing the news of his restoration in person. He had made a great sacrifice for her; well, she would thank him, and release him from effacing himself any longer—what more was she bound to do? Was it nothing that she should seek him out in his misery, humble herself before him—she who had once held her head so high? If he chose to claim her, to make a merit of what he had done—why, that would prove him despicable indeed, and she would have the right to despise him once more. His sacrifice—was *she* giving up nothing? He had borne hardships and disgrace for not two years; he would regain far more now than he had ever lost—but she, she had lost lover, home, friends, all that had made her life, and none of this would have been had Allen never existed, or had he even acted with common sense! No, she could not be grateful, she would not pretend that she was—he could not make her a debtor against her will! She would acknowledge her obligation as fully and freely as he could desire—indeed, she must not let him perceive that it was less than he imagined—but when she had done that, and proved to him that his father's house was open to him once more, she would have done all that anyone could expect her to do, and her debt would be discharged.

She found herself nearing London with a shivering repugnance; the first straggling rows of raw terraces amongst the fields and hedges made her heart sink, she grudged each telegraph pole as it flashed by.

From time to time she had been haunted during the journey by the irony of Nugent travelling in the same train, the necessity of

evading him at the terminus, and, when they arrived, she kept her seat as long as possible, until, in fact, a porter gave her the superfluous information that 'they didn't go no further,' after which she was ashamed to stay in the carriage.

Having no luggage to detain her, she was able to drive away at once, and told her cabman to take her to the address scrawled by Allen on the scrap of paper which she still preserved. As her hansom passed out of the station, she had one last glimpse of Nugent's tall figure in the group before the luggage-van; he was too much engaged in identifying his portmanteaus to look round. 'Even now,' she thought, 'he is not too heart-broken to think about his hat-box!' and then she smiled, though bitterly, at her own unreasonableness.

It was a long drive across London to Clerkenwell; the streets seemed close and fetid after the pure country air; she was morbidly alive to the ugliness and squalor through which much of their road lay. And yet it was not all ugly—could not be on that lovely August evening, with the dingy brick fronts of the houses, giving out a warm apricot glow, and towers and steeples shining like enchanted palaces in sunset glories of rose and gold, while, towards the East, a few flamingo-tinted clouds sailed, like lazy dragons, through the blue-green sky. And in the humbler and quieter streets there was a pleasant air of relaxation, small shopkeepers gazing placidly from their doors, women chatting at street-corners, children dancing on the pavement to a friendly piano-organ—much, even in busy, toiling, ugly London, to see and feel the better for.

But Margot had no eyes for it; as she drove on, her imagination was busy dramatising the scene that was coming. Should she find Allen in his lodgings, would he be in a state to understand her—reckless, obstinate, how should she make it clear to him that her own return was hopeless, that to delay his for another day would be boyish folly? If he were to insist on remaining where she was, how should she escape? She felt that she might be encountering difficulties, even dangers, but she relied on her own courage and address to carry her through—she could not rest until she had accomplished this act of penance.

The cab stopped before a house which, if respectable, was poor and mean-looking enough. Margot, as she alighted, felt its squalor—but rather on her own account than on Allen's. The woman who let the rooms came to the door, a typical London landlady of the lower class—dirty, untidy, cringing, yet suspicious.

She was plainly surprised at this stately young lady's inquiry for any lodger of hers, particularly as Margot's appearance did not suggest the 'Bible-woman.'

'I am a friend of Mr. Chadwick's,' said Margot. When it came to the point, she could not bring herself to mention their relationship.

'If you're a friend, miss,' said the woman, 'in course that's another thing, but I didn't know as Mr. Chadwick had friends

among the quality, nor yet no friends belonging to him anywheres, which he never give me to understand so himself.'

'Is he at home now? Can I see him?' asked Margot curtly.

The woman wiped her hands on her apron. 'Well, no, miss,' she said apologetically; 'it so 'appens that you can't see him, not at this partickler time. I'm sure I 'ope you won't blame me for hacting as I did, seeing as I'm a poor woman with my living to get, and no one to look to for any expenses I might be put to, and thinking it best he should go, on all accounts.'

'If you mean you have turned him out of your house,' said Margot, 'you have done a thing you will be sorry for for your own sake!'

'It's well for you to talk, miss, but he's better off at the 'orspital than what he'd ha' been if I'd kep' him where he was.'

'The hospital! exclaimed Margot, with a strange contraction of the heart, 'has he had an accident? Where is he?'

'At Sin Bartholomew's 'orspital, miss. You see, he was away for a day and night about a week ago, and he come home sopping wet the follering afternoon, and looking that bad, I see he'd taken a chill, and I arst him to lay up a bit, but he didn't seem to care what he did, and he wouldn't take no advice nor nothing, and the next day he couldn't get up to his work, and I knew he'd be laid up for some time. And seeing as I couldn't nurse him here, having no conveniences for sickness in my 'ouse, why, I 'ad him took to the 'orspital, miss, where he'd 'ave all he required.'

'You did quite right,' said Margot hurriedly. 'Tell me, where is this place? Will they let me see him there if I go?'

'Bless you, yes, miss, if it's the proper time. I know when my poor son fell off of a van and was laying there, they let me go in and see him every day. And if you want to go there now, there's my little boy 'ere as will go with you and show the way. Jimmy, put on your 'at and go with the lady to the 'orspital—you know.'

So Jimmy acted as Margot's escort. 'Do you know,' she asked him, as he padded along at her side, 'if Mr. Chadwick is really ill or not?'

'He didn't look very bad, miss, he 'ad quite a colour when they come for him with the stretcher. I 'ope as nothink won't 'appen to him, miss. He treated me and Polly—that's my sister, Polly is—very kind allus. Day he went orf, he give us sixpence atween us two, and told us he should come back either very 'appy or very miserable, he didn't know which, and we was to wish him luck. And we did, miss, but he ain't 'ad much on it yet. This here's Bartholomew's gate, miss; the porter 'll tell you if you can see him.'

'Thank you, Jimmy,' said Margot, 'and—and I want you to take this, if you will, and give half to Polly.'

'Why, it's arf-a-dollar, miss!' cried the boy. 'Did you *mean* it?'

'It's because you were kind to Mr. Chadwick,' said Margot, wishing he were clean enough to kiss. Her eyes were stung

with tears as she passed under the double archway. 'Those poor children were kind,' she was thinking, 'why could not *I* be kinder?—why? why?'

The porter told her the name of the ward in which Allen was, and, if she went up, she was told, she might be permitted to see him. The quadrangle within looked cool and quiet with its fine trees, under which one or two medical students were strolling bareheaded in the dusk. She found the right door and went up the broad stairs, clinging to the old oak balusters; at the several landing-stages there were the great doors of the wards, from which came a faint odour of anæsthetics and the hushed wailing of infants, and at the top of all was the ward she sought; she stopped for a moment on the threshold, dreading to enter, and then, overcoming her terror, she went in.

There was nothing repulsive, nothing grim or obtrusively painful in the scene that met her eyes. The long ward had a cheerful look, with the bright pictures on the walls, the flowers, and bird-cages in the windows, the touches of colour from the pink counterpanes and blue checked curtains, the general impression of air and light. She felt reassured: it seemed a place to get well in—not to die in.

As she stood there, one of the Nurses, a girl of about her own age, came up in her pretty striped hospital dress, and, on hearing her object, told her the number of Allen's bed.

'I will take you to him,' she said; 'may I ask if you are a friend of his?'

'I am his sister.'

'I am afraid he will not know you; he has been delirious most of the day,' she said.

'Is he—is he dangerously ill?' asked Margot, with renewed alarm.

'The doctor does not give much hope,' said the nurse, with a gentle matter-of-factness, 'but there is still a chance that he will get over it. It is inflammation of the lungs.'

Margot passed up between the rows of beds to the end of the room, and there, with his hands spread out on the coverlet, a bright flush on his face, Allen was lying; his eyes were bright, and she thought, as she took the revolving seat by his bedside and spoke his name softly, that he knew her.

But he went on muttering—at first incoherent sentences, and then, as though her presence affected him to some degree, more lucidly.

'Tell her I didn't cheat in the Casino,' he was saying, evidently imagining himself back at Trouville; 'she thinks I did—that's why she has gone away—and I shall never see her again, never!'

Then the scene shifted. 'Didn't you know, Margot? You're going to live with *us* now—all of you, always! . . . I shall see her every day—every day! We are bound to be friends now, aren't we? But I wish she looked more pleased over it. I didn't

think she'd mind it so much as that! She'll get used to it in time; we'll be like one family together in no time—don't you think so? People do—living in the same house and that, and it isn't as if I was a stranger to her, either, is it? And I'm sure I'll try my best to make her feel at home and happy. . . . She is feeling strange at first, but she'll come round right enough. . . . I wish she'd take more notice of me. I do all I can to please her—but she never notices. When she sees me start out hunting on Hussar—but isn't Hussar dead? And—and I remember now . . . that's why she laughed at me; that's why they'll none of 'em speak to me now! . . . I didn't think *you'd* turn against me, Lettie, but it don't signify. You're my friend, Bob, don't *you* think I'm treated rather bad? Ah, you don't know her, or you wouldn't say she does it to draw me on! . . . I tell you she's not the girl a fellow could act bold with; she—she makes you feel small somehow . . . and—yet, there she is—opposite. I never saw her look like that before—she's sorry about something. . . . Ah, what a fool I was—what a fool! I couldn't help it. Why did she half shut her eyes in that way? Now she hates me! If I could only make her own that I could act like a gentleman! If there was only something I could do for her, to make her friends with me again! . . . She *is* friends, or why does she write? Tell me that. . . . I don't care—they may call me a thief if they like—it's only for a little while; only for a little while! When she comes back it will be all right. . . . But she *is* back, and—she doesn't say anything! I can't get to see her alone; she's always in Ida's room. Why does she never mention that letter?—she never does. I won't be the first. I'll show her I can be gentleman. I won't allude to it till *she* does. . . . Ah, but I must—I must . . . they're going to send me to India—away from her, and still she won't say anything! There she sits—so pretty, and scornful, and silent, and knowing all the time! If you keep a lady's secrets and bear the blame of what she's done, you mustn't go and remind her of it—that isn't manners! It's not as if she didn't know! Susan shan't get anything out of me. I'll go to India, if that will please her. . . . There—she *is* sorry for me; grateful, too, only she doesn't like to say so; she doesn't want anyone to know yet. She trusts me—I'll show her I'm to be trusted. I'd sooner die than split on her now she's kind again. . . . She is singing "Abide with me" . . . no—no, it's not Margot, not Margot—only one of the passengers in the saloon . . . it—it sounded so like. . . . I thought I was back there outside the church in the dark, at Lingford. I forgot I was on board ship—going to India. That's how it was, Mr. Denham—it was hearing the tune.'

And here his mind began to ramble back to the Indian gold fields; he was watching the digging, or the crushing, card-playing in the miners' bungalows, but always on the verge of becoming immensely rich. 'It's there—they all say it's there!' he would repeat again and again; 'veins of it—lodes of it! They've struck the dip—at last! The shares are going up already . . . Margot, I

shall see you again very soon now . . . you won't despise me when I come back rich . . . I—I knew what I was doing, you see—better than indigo-planting, with everyone thinking me a thief !'

She had to sit there and hear it all : her attempts to soothe him were unheeded ; she could only wait, hoping to catch the first sign of returning intelligence to which she could appeal for forgiveness ; and still he wandered, and every word she heard came as a fresh stab. The pride in which she had wrapped herself so stubbornly fell from her there ; at last she saw herself as she was, with no sophistries, no self-delusions, to shelter her from her own contempt.

Was it she indeed who had persistently scorned, misjudged, and ill-treated this poor boy, who had borne all this for love of her ? She, who—not an hour ago—had been framing little speeches of haughtily conventional gratitude, questioning his claims even to such meagre acknowledgment as that ? And now—when no atonement seemed too much to be made—his ears were closed to her remorse, his lips could not frame the forgiveness without which she would know no peace !

CHAPTER X

BEYOND HER POWER

Child, if it were thine error or thy crime
I care no longer, being all unblest,
We'd whom thou wilt—but I am sick of Time
And I desire to rest.
Pass on, weak heart, and leave me where I lie,
Go by, Go by.

Tennyson.

THE dusk slowly deepened till the green summits of the trees in the courtyard were no longer visible in the blue-grey outside the windows. It was the hour when even exceptional visitors were expected to leave, and, as Margot heard the hushed good-byes or forced-cheerful leave-takings that were taking place around her, she remembered for the first time that, when she too went, she would have no place to go to. The house physician was just going his round, and remained for some time by Allen's bedside ; when he had finished his examination and given some directions to the nurse, Margot, who had been requested to withdraw during these proceedings, returned and spoke to him. ' Will you tell me,' she said imploringly, ' how long he will be like this—when he will know me ?'

' I am afraid I cannot say that.'

' And must I go away now, leaving him like—like this ?'

'Ah,' said the doctor, 'you would wish to remain here for the night, then?'

'Oh, if I might!' said Margot eagerly.

'I will go and speak to "Sister" about it and see if it can be arranged,' he replied. 'Ah, I must wait, I see—' he added, with an accent that hardly denoted pleasure at the interruption—'they are going to have prayers.'

The ward sister had taken her stand at the other end of the room, opposite a reading-desk on which a single candle lit up her clear-cut face amidst the surrounding obscurity, and presently in a soft gentle voice she began to read some of the prayers and collects from the evening service, ending with the Lord's Prayer, which was repeated after her by most of the patients who were in a condition to attend. There was something striking and impressive in the whole scene, a strangely touching effect in those humble child-like responses from men many of whom must have felt themselves very near the solution of the great mystery.

When the simple function was over the sister came forward to make arrangements for Margot's comfort during the night. A couch was brought and placed near Allen's bed.

For some hours she sat there, and during the earlier part of the time his talk ran on and most of it was intelligible, while what she heard was, if possible, even more painful than before.

He fancied himself in the garden with her, but all recollection of what had happened there was lost. 'Margot!' he kept repeating, 'do you *mean* it? Will you really marry me?—*me!* . . . All the time I was away, I hoped you would say something—but not this . . . I thought you couldn't care for a poor good-for-nothing chap like me—not in that way. But you do—you do! . . . You shan't have to be ashamed of me like you used to, dear, about my not riding, and that. I'm not afraid of a horse now. I learnt to stick on—out there . . . we shall have such rides together, Margot! I saw you and Lettie to-day, and I thought, "Will they ever let me ride with them?" And now you will! . . . Tear up the letter, Lettie, it isn't wanted any longer. Margot is going to tell them how it was . . . the governor shan't say anything to you, Margot, how could he if you look at him like that! To think of living at home after all—with you, and Lettie, and old Yarrow, and everybody!'

He gave a long sigh of delight, and then his murmurings became more and more indistinct and presently died away altogether in peaceful sleep; the flush had faded from his face, and he lay there with a smile of exhausted content.

Margot, as she looked at him sleeping there, felt some wonder at her old repulsion: was it that suffering and illness had done something to refine his face? All she knew was that—homely and unhandsome as it might be—she found no meanness or insignificance in it now.

When would he awake? She sat on in the lowered light; from

one or two of the neighbouring beds came moans of pain or impatience at intervals. An old Jew in an opposite bed, who was dying of some internal disease, kept up a dismal croon of 'Ah, la, la! bi-bi-bi!' for hours, to cheat the gnawing pain, only stopping to curse a parrot when it woke and croaked drowsily. The nurses came round from time to time, taking temperatures and administering medicines, often to meet with peevish ingratitude from the sufferers.

One of the night nurses came to Margot and persuaded her to lie down, since she could do nothing for Allen now. 'I will call you if there is a change,' she said; and Margot lay down on the couch, though it was some time before she closed her eyes.

While she had been sitting by Allen's bed she had seen her duty in a new light: she had formed the resolve which, a few hours ago, no power on earth could have wrung from her—she had decided that she must marry Allen.

Not that she had come to love him—that would never be; even now, in the very height of her pity, she foresaw that she would have a reaction to contend with—that when Allen got well, as he would now, since he was sleeping so quietly, and the nurse had spoken of a change—when Allen got well, the real ordeal would begin.

But she had done with love; she would find her happiness now in doing her duty—in trying to give her poor despised lover some return for all she had cost him, since she was still desirable in his eyes. When he awoke he would be able to understand, and she would tell him that she was there, and that he must hasten to get well and be happy.

Then she too slept, and in her sleep there came a terrible dream. She was Allen's wife, and he had reverted to his worst; she saw him, more degraded, more contemptible, than in the old days. And now they were quarrelling—one of those intense and vivid scenes which Nature in repose presents with such terrific dramatic force and realism. It was in the library at Agra House, and she was remonstrating with him as he sat there, huddled up, blinking evilly at her with bemused red eyes; she was appealing to his love for her. And then he turned on her, and his eyes had the same mocking light in them she knew so well in his father's, and he told her that he had never loved her, always hated her, that he had married her, partly out of revenge, partly out of pity! And, as she heard, she saw Nugent Orme standing in the doorway, and woke with a cry.

The birds were chirping in the coming dawn: the foliage, the lines of roof and cornice, were all sharply revealed in the raw bluish light of early day.

She remembered her dream with a shudder. Thank God, it was a dream! And yet if it were to come true—if it were sent as a warning? She lay trembling there, the resolution with which she had fallen asleep ebbing away as the daylight broadened; no—she could *not* marry Allen: she would be a tender, loving sister to him,

she would go back to her home, if they would have her there, she would bear any humiliation her step-father chose to visit upon her; but marry Allen—ah, that could not be exacted from her!

She heard a sound behind her and saw the nurse standing by her couch.

‘Has the change come?’ she cried, and, starting up, she saw that a screen had been placed round Allen’s bed.

‘It came in the night,’ the nurse said softly, taking Margot’s hand, ‘before we could call you. . . . My dear, my dear, don’t cry so—the end came quite peacefully; he died in his sleep!’

He had died in his sleep; the last impressions on his disturbed brain had been happier ones than any she could have given—why should she wish it otherwise for him? But oh! the bitter remorse of feeling that she had not remained steadfast even in that tardy atonement of hers, that he was dead and never knew that she was there seeking his forgiveness! He had fallen, defeated in the great struggle; she lived and was free—but the victory was not with her.

CHAPTER XI.

A HOUSE OF MOURNING.

MARGOT’S escape, which, besides baulking her step-father’s schemes of vengeance, deprived him of his best chance of discovering Allen’s whereabouts, rekindled Chadwick’s fury to a pitch that deprived him of all mastery of himself. He accused his wife of being a party to her flight, and vowed that unless the fugitive returned he would break up his household, and leave his family with the barest means of subsistence.

Mrs. Chadwick sought to pacify him in vain; drink and excitement combined had made him almost insane. He terrified her by his threats of violence, which there was plainly a real danger of his carrying out. The poor woman was obliged to beg Guy Hotham not to leave the house at present, much as she would have preferred to conceal the family scandal, if possible, and he consented, out of anxiety for Ida.

By the next morning, however, Chadwick had quieted down, or rather his excitement had passed into another phase. Margot was forgotten for the time; his mind was full of plans for celebrating Allen’s return. He talked of a grand dinner, of flags and illuminations, of rejoicings in which the whole village should join; his distempered fancy ran wild on these grotesque and fantastic ideas, amongst which that of forcing his unwilling family to assist in their own humiliation was foremost.

He was enlarging on these schemes, and making his preparations

for going up to London at once to begin the search, when a telegram was brought in. 'It's about the boy,' he said, and then, as he glanced through it, his face turned livid. 'Look at that!' he said to his wife. The telegram contained these words: '*Allen is here very ill. Come at once. You will find me here. Be prepared for the worst. Margot, Bartholomew's Hospital.*'

'I shall find her there!' he repeated with a sinister emphasis. 'If I find her, and not him, I know what I shall do. Yes, I know what I shall do!'

As Guy sat in the morning-room trying to read, Mrs. Chadwick burst in, pale with fear. 'Guy, dear Guy!' she gasped, 'a telegram has come from Margot. Allen is dying in a hospital, and she is with him. My husband is going up there at once. Oh, I am afraid, I am afraid! I saw him take out a revolver. If—if he finds Allen is dead, he is capable of anything. For God's sake go with him; you can telegraph to her at the station; tell her she must not stay. I think he is mad. Oh, make haste and go with him, he is just starting . . . you will do this for us, we are so helpless!'

Guy sprang up, glad of any kind of action just then. 'Of course,' he said cheerfully, 'I'll go. I'll keep him from getting near her, never fear, he shan't touch Margot. Don't tell Ida where I've gone, she might be nervous.'

Chadwick was standing in the hall as he came out; 'Will you give me a lift as far as the station, sir?' Guy said, as nonchalantly as he could. Chadwick did not hear him, he was preparing to get in.

'Better let me take the reins, sir,' said Topham, from the horse's head. 'I've had to put 'Arebell in the trap, the other 'osses not being fit to go out, and the mare's fresh and she'll take some driving.'

'Do you think I can't drive?' cried Chadwick with an oath. 'I'll give her driving enough. Here, get up behind and hold your fool's tongue.'

Guy saw that if permission was asked, it would be refused, and so, as soon as Chadwick took the reins, he sprang up behind the dog-cart. Topham gave the mare her head, and his master started her with a cut which sent them down the drive at a gallop, leaving Topham himself far in the rear.

He came back to the porch. 'Master won't stop to take me up now, ma'am,' he said, 'he didn't ought to ha' drove, and that's the truth. Is Mr. Hotham going to bring the trap back, or what?'

'No, no,' said Mrs. Chadwick, 'go down to the station, and as fast as you can, you will be wanted to take the dog-cart home.'

Topham went off grumbling. 'To the station?' he muttered to himself, 'they're lucky if they get there! I know I wish I'd put the cob in, lame as he is. 'Arebell ain't used to such work, she ain't.'

That morning, as Millicent Orme stood at her window in the Vicarage, looking out over the sweetbriar hedge upon the broad

street, she heard shouts in the distance, and the sounds of wildly galloping hoofs; some of the shopkeepers rushed to their doors, the village-constable stood in the middle of the road with outstretched arms, and then, thinking better of it, stepped back, and she saw Chadwick's dog-cart dash by at headlong speed, veering and yawing from side to side. The driver had evidently lost all control of his animal, and, as they flashed by, a young man on the back seat was clambering across in a desperate effort to seize the reins and stop the maddened horse. The clatter died away, and a crowd set off running in the direction the vehicle had taken, while other villagers, more stolid, stood at their doorways discussing its probable fate.

A few minutes later, a man came running back, to be instantly surrounded; he went to the doctor's house opposite, and presently the doctor appeared, and both hurried down towards the station. Millicent ran down into the garden and out into the road, where she fell in with a stream of villagers. 'What has happened, can you tell me?' she asked of them. 'Is any one hurt?'

'Don't rightly know as yet, miss,' said the saddler, 'but it's like to be a pretty bad haccident, I see that as they come by,' he said, with pride in his own discernment. 'That there Chadwick didn't seem to know or care as the 'oss was a runnin' away with 'em. And young Muster Otham with him, too! Lor dear, if anythink has 'appened along of he, there'll be fine trouble up at 'Awleigh, there'll be that, and him the hair an' all! Ah, here be Muster Topham—you were you tipped off, Muster Topham, or how was it?'

'I'd give a thousan' pounds if this hadn't happened,' said Topham hoarsely, and panting after his run. 'If master had given me the reins, as I wanted him to, there'd ha' been none o' this 'ere work.'

'Here they come!' said a labourer, 'ah, and they've been 'urt sure 'nough; they be carryin' one of 'em on a geatt. And the tother one, yes, he'll be 'urt bad, too, they're liftin' of 'un along in a 'orse-rug: ah, dear me, such things ain't been seen in Gorsecombe since I've lived 'ere. Stand back, miss, do'ee now,' he added suddenly; 'it ain't no sight for such as ye.'

Millicent had already drawn back, with an instinctive dread. It was a dead man that was being borne past her now, with a hushed crowd following at a respectful distance.

Joshua Chadwick's violence had been stilled for ever. He lay there in dreadful inertness, some person had thrown a handkerchief over his face, and Millicent caught her breath in an agony lest it should fall, and yet was powerless to turn away her eyes.

After him came four men bearing Guy Hotham, who seemed dead, too, though, as a matter of fact, he still breathed. The doctor walked by his side, and the grim little procession was brought up by Topham leading the trembling, wild-eyed mare, with the broken shafts dangling from her collar. 'She'll never be fit for no more work!' he was saying to sympathising companions, 'such a kind

little 'oss as she was too! If she'd been druv' proper, she'd never ha' come to this end. God forgive me, but when I see a 'oss treated so, I think a broken neck's no more than his deserts, a madman he was if ever I see one!'

Later, Millicent heard the details from one of the eye-witnesses. The dog-cart had overturned at a corner, Chadwick being instantly killed, and Guy Hotham, who had been thrown upon a heap of stones, taken up insensible; the doctors pronounced it a severe case of concussion of the brain, and considered his recovery almost hopeless. Lady Adela and her daughter Joceline came over in haste from Hawleigh Court, but they had to be content to nurse him at Agra House, as it was impossible to move him.

The accident furnished the staple of village conversation; in the grocers' shops or the alehouse parlour, the persons who had been fortunate enough to see it happen enjoyed a brilliant social success. The village hairdresser, who was also a literary character, being accredited local reporter to the 'Pineshire Herald,' drew up a thrilling account of the disaster for his paper, in his finest language, of course describing it as 'a shocking fatality which has cast a decided gloom over the locality.' Rumour was busy with the events at Agra House which had preceded the catastrophe—how Miss Chevening had run away the day before, it was believed to be secretly married to young Mr. Allen up in London, and how his father was actually on his way to stop the runaway match. Many wondered 'how Madam Chadwick would take it,' and especially how she was 'left.'

Little of all this gossip had penetrated the Vicarage walls; the Vicar had gone up to Agra House, as his office required, to offer sympathy and religious consolation, without succeeding in seeing any of the family. Lady Adela and Miss Hotham were there in attendance on Guy, but they were thrown very much on their own resources, for Mrs. Chadwick was too prostrated to pay any attention to their comforts.

One evening, a day or two after the accident, Millicent was sitting alone in the Vicarage, when a visitor was announced, and Ida entered.

For a time she clung to Millicent without a word, incapable of speech for the deep dry sobbing that shook her slight frame. The two girls had never been very intimate, and the elder was surprised and even more touched by the confidence and dependence such a visit implied now.

'I know, you poor Ida,' she said, 'I know how horribly sad it is for you—don't try to speak just yet.'

'I must,' said Ida, 'or I shall go mad. Millicent, it is so dreadful at home. Lady Adela manages everything. Mother has left it all to her, and—and they won't let me go to him. He has never spoken—not once since; he was only conscious for a short time. The doctors say he may get over it yet, but I know he is dying. God means him to die—to punish me!'

'Dear Ida, do not give way to such thoughts! God does not punish us through the innocent. If Guy is taken away, it will be not because of any wrong you may have done, but because, though we cannot see or understand it now, it is best so, Ida.'

'You may say so—believe so, if you like—but I *know* He is punishing me. Why, Millicent, but for me, Guy would not have gone on that dogcart. That shows—that shows! Oh, tell me, Millicent, if I speak now and own what I have done, will God forgive me—will He let Guy live if I do—will He, Millicent—will He?'

'Is your silence injuring someone else?'

'Yes,' said Ida in a whisper.

'Then speak, dear, not from any hope of advantage, but because it is right. Speak—only to someone who has a better right to hear than I have.'

'I don't know who that is now, and I feel as if I *must* tell somebody. Millicent, if you will sit with your face turned away, and promise not to look at me, I think I could tell *you*. Don't interrupt me, or I can't go on. It was all so long ago, when I was quite a child—is one punished the same for what one does as a child, I wonder?—it is not fair! But Allen had a tutor then—Mr. Melladew—and I—I was silly enough to fall madly in love with him. Miss Henderson knew all about it, and she said he cared for me, too, only he was too proud to show it. And I believed it all, and when Mr. Melladew was sent away I was miserable. Then Miss Henderson managed for herself and me to go down to Bourne-mouth; she hinted that perhaps *he* would be there part of the time. But I didn't see him, and she went on making excuses for him, and I believed them. At last one day I did see him, and he passed by without even looking at me, and I couldn't understand it. She told me he was so sensitive, felt my step-father's treatment so very keenly, and that was why he had not liked to speak to me. So she arranged meetings with him in various places, and I gave her letters to take to him and she brought back answers by word. But he wouldn't write or consent to see me, she said—not yet, at least, and she said after each interview with him that she had *almost* persuaded him that there would be no harm in his just meeting me for once. He was so dreadfully poor, she said—too poor to stay there very long, for he had scarcely any money, and my step-father had refused to pay him any salary. I was so afraid he would leave without seeing me again, and I hated to think that he had not been fairly treated at our house. I thought he was angry with me, too, a little, and that was why he would go on refusing to see me. Oh, I know I was silly to be deceived so easily; but just remember how young I was, and I thought myself so desperately in love then! . . . Well, I wanted him to have the money, and yet I had none of my own, or not enough, and I knew my step-father would never pay. Then I remembered that at home I had a valuable locket which I never wore. If I could only

sell that and send him the money and make him think my step-father sent it—people do those things in novels, and I had read so many! Even if he found me out, it would touch him, I thought. But I was afraid to sell the thing myself in any of the Bournemouth shops—I thought the people would ask questions, or cheat me, perhaps. Then at last I thought if I could only get someone at home to do it for me—but Margot was at Bournemouth with me; and, besides, I knew she would refuse, for she did not like Mr. Melladew. There was only Allen—and Allen hated me, and was just as likely to tell somebody to spite me, or tease me about it always in a hateful way he had! But I knew he would do anything for Margot, and so—you know I write so like her—I put her name to the letter. The lockets were both exactly the same, so if he took hers instead of mine, it wouldn't matter, and I meant to explain it all. So I sent the letter without telling Camilla about it, and she promised that she would manage some way of bringing us together very soon. I waited and waited for an answer from Allen, but before it came I found a letter from Camilla one dreadful morning asking me to forgive her for having deceived me from the first. It was she whom Mr. Melladew had been in love with all the time! He had arranged that they should meet now and then, and as soon as she had stayed at Bournemouth the right number of days, he was to come down and marry her at the Registry Office; and they had been just married when she wrote. I thought I should have died then—I wanted to . . . I was very ill; everything was a blank for ever so long; and even when I remembered, I couldn't be sure how much of it was real, and how much a dreadful, shameful dream! I did not seem to love him any longer. I couldn't believe that I ever had really loved him like that, and yet—there was that letter about the locket! . . . I knew Allen was going away, and I was half afraid of—I don't know what; so I asked Margot one day why he had to go. I forget what she said, but it made my mind easier, and when I looked and found both the lockets all right, I felt sure I had dreamed it all—or at least that Allen had not done what I had asked him. So I made myself believe—you know how you can make yourself believe things—that all that part was not real, only imagination, and gradually I got not to think about it at all. It was not a pleasant subject, I need not tell you . . . Millicent, why do you say nothing?' she broke off, inconsistently enough.

'I am thinking . . . it is all so strange, so new to me,' said Millicent; 'I can't understand it all at once. Had Allen's going away anything to do with your letter?'

'Yes, yes—oh, didn't I tell you? He *did* believe the writing was Margot's, and he took the locket out of her room—only, he was caught in the act, and he thought Margot wanted it kept a secret—I had said so, because I *did* want it very much—so he never said anything . . . Millicent, indeed I didn't know all this then! Tell me, was what I did so very bad?'

'If you really did not know—though surely you might have guessed—you might have asked more questions than you did. I think no one would blame you very severely; you were very young, and, as you say, very foolish. Is that all, Ida?'

'Not quite all,' said Ida. 'You know that at Homburg poor Guy proposed to me. I love him far, far better than ever I did Mr. Melladew; I didn't know then what love really meant—I do now. . . . Well, and I was so happy again, and yet—and yet, from things Guy said, I knew that he would leave off liking me if he thought I had ever cared for anyone before him. You see,' she added, with some *naïveté*, 'I had told him that I never had—he made me. Then we came home, and the same night Margot told me . . . Oh, Millicent, it was terrible! First of all, she asked me if I had really written that letter, and I was obliged to say I had, though I had really forgotten—almost forgotten—doing it. Then she told me all about Allen's being accused of theft, and how a wicked, wicked maid of ours had found my wretched letter, and meant to show it to my step-father. Think, Millicent, what I felt then!—it would all come out—Guy would know everything—he would be sure to believe I was worse than I really was; and my step-father never liked me, and I was so afraid of him! Margot tried to make me tell her everything, but I was frightened—I would not say anything more, except beg her to save me somehow. I went on my knees to her; I said I would run away, drown myself—anything rather than face my step-father after he knew. I was perfectly frantic. And, at last, Margot said she had thought of a way; if I would promise not to betray myself, she would take all the blame. You see,' added Ida, 'it did not matter for *her* so much—she had parted with Nugent already—and then she is braver than I am, naturally, and my step-father liked her much the best. And it was a good deal her fault, too—she owned that herself—for believing Allen was a thief, and getting him sent away. If she had been kinder, it would have been all found out at once. . . . So I agreed, and the next day she told everything, leaving my name out, of course, and I believe my step-father was terribly angry. Then Margot ran away, and a telegram came, and he started off to drive to the station in a fearful passion, and mother got Guy to go with him, and then—you know what happened after that . . . And you see it *was* my fault that Guy had to go, and God *is* punishing me!' concluded Ida in a strain of perverse insistence.

'Has Allen been found—why is he not at home?'

'Ah, that is the worst of it! He is dead, Millicent; he died in a hospital in London somewhere. Masterman has gone up to-day to arrange about bringing him home.'

'Dead!' exclaimed Millicent. 'Allen dead, too!'

'It is dreadful, isn't it?' said Ida; 'but there are so many other dreadful things now! . . . Millicent, I wish you would tell me again that you don't think I have been so *very* wicked.'

'I can't tell you so,' said Millicent indignantly; 'I *do* think you

have been wicked—wickedly selfish and cowardly—to let Margot sacrifice herself for your sake!’

Ida began to weep in an injured manner. ‘Millicent,’ she sobbed, ‘I didn’t think you would speak so cruelly to me—when Guy is dying, and I am so miserable! . . . I wish I had never told you—but you are not to breathe a word to anyone else; mind, I put you on your honour!’

‘You don’t deserve to be happy, Ida. Why, even now, it is only yourself you think about! Are you going to let Margot take all the blame upon herself? Have you never suspected *why* she and Nugent agreed to part? You talk of my being on my honour; I did not pledge myself in any way, and I do not mean to let my only brother be wretched all his days to spare you a little uneasiness. If this leads him to alter his opinion of Margot, he has a right to be told; and he shall be told!’

Once before, Millicent remembered, she had gone through a scene with Margot herself, in which her indignation had been roused in a somewhat similar way; but the elder Miss Chevening, even when she seemed most heartless, had never excited the contempt she felt now for this weak, nerveless sister of hers.

‘If he does alter his opinion,’ Ida argued sullenly, ‘it will be no good now. Margot told me he was nothing to her now, and never could be.’

‘She is very much to him, still, which is reason enough. If you were more generous, you would not turn a statement she made to induce you to accept the sacrifice into an argument against her now. I shall tell my brother everything, Ida, though it shall remain a secret to everyone else. If you are wise, though, you will tell Guy.’

‘Tell Guy!’ Ida burst out passionately. ‘Guy is dying! What does it matter to me now if all the world knows! Everyone is unkind to me now, just when I thought I was going to be so happy! Why have I come here, when Guy may be wanting me, calling for me this minute? I will not stay any longer. He may be dying even now, and I away from him!’

When Ida had gone, Millicent sat in a reverie, which was sad enough. Her heart was sore for the bright young life on which so many hopes and interests depended, and which seemed about to close with such pitiful suddenness and futility; sore for that other life, that had ended yet more pitifully in the London hospital, after so much unmerited and unrecompensed suffering; sore for his father, cut off in the first bitterness of discovering an irreparable injustice.

It seemed hard and unnatural almost to think of constructing any happiness out of such wreckage as this; and yet she felt a great hope, now that Nugent had quitted Margot in ignorance of all the facts, that fuller knowledge would infallibly soften his heart towards her, and restore something of his lost ideal.

Millicent longed to be the means of bringing them together

again, and that night she wrote a long letter, in which she told all she had learnt from Ida, and pleaded all excuses that could be urged in mitigation of the part Margot had played, and this letter, with many prayers for its success, she posted in the village next day.

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It may be true enough, as a general axiom, that a law of inexorable logic works out the consequences of every sin, whether of commission or omission, to the end of the chain; and in some cases the operation of the law is made visible to the most careless of us—an object-lesson from which we may deduce a useful moral for our brothers' edification. But, in other cases, the moral is less patent; it almost seems as if the Furies had wearied of tormenting the evil-doer, or Nemesis had found her lame foot too much of a clog, and limped home again. Yet, even here, the cessation may be rather apparent than real, or the retribution be deferred and fall under conditions at which we can but dimly guess. Perhaps there are some natures, too, so weak and irresponsible as to be unworthy of punishment under any conceivable scheme of justice.

We cannot know, nor is it very profitable perhaps to touch on these questions in this place, except by way of preparation for the fact that, after all, the punishment Ida dreaded was averted. Guy did not die; his strong constitution brought him through in time, and Ida escaped with a season of wearing anxiety which many a girl whose thoughtlessness and selfishness have harmed none seriously but herself has been called upon to bear, with no such happy conclusion to redeem it as came to Ida. For Lady Adela, in her joy at Guy's recovery, abandoned her former cold toleration of his choice. Ida's pale prettiness and graceful timidity, together with their fellowship in affliction, had won her heart, particularly as all that had made such an alliance most objectionable was now removed.

Chadwick had died a wealthy man, and without having had time to destroy or alter the will he had made in favour of his wife and her children. Ida would be entitled to a considerable sum on her marriage, and the Hothams were not rich enough to be entirely uninfluenced by the fact.

As for Mrs. Chadwick, after the first shock was passed, she was able to realise how wonderfully accident (she spoke of it reverently as 'Providence') had favoured her at a desperate crisis. The husband she had never loved and had learnt to fear would never trouble her more; an uncouth and repulsive step-son was gone, too, where he could be no disgrace to them; she was free, rich; the scandal which might have injured them had had no time to get abroad—she had everything now for which she endured the humiliation and penance of her second marriage.

One of her earliest acts was to get rid of Susan, and, though not a wise woman in many respects, Mrs. Chadwick was astute enough to take a tone towards the girl which convinced her that her

power was gone. But then, Susan, subdued and terrified by the tragedy she had helped to bring about, with her malice baulked and her ambition frustrated, was not a very difficult person to deal with; she left, and her further doings do not concern this history.

Still there was one drop of bitterness in Mrs. Chadwick's cup. After sending that telegram from the hospital, Margot had suddenly disappeared. As soon as Mrs. Chadwick was in a condition to realise this, she made search for her daughter in all the most possible quarters, but without success. She had not gone to her aunt, Lady Yaverland, nor to any of her old Chiswick friends; Mrs. Antrobus knew nothing of her, and soon a terrible dread of another and yet more cruel tragedy beset Mrs. Chadwick, giving her no rest by night or day. At last, to her inexpressible relief, news came in the shape of a letter from Margot herself; it seemed to have been delayed by foreign posts, and simply said that she had gone abroad, and that her mother was not to feel any anxiety about her, as she was perfectly safe and in good hands. She had not been able to stay in England, she said; she had not dared, after all, to remain and face her step-father. When Guy was out of danger, and Ida was on a visit to Hawleigh Court, her mother wrote to inform Margot that there was no longer any reason why she should not return to her home.

The letter, which was addressed to a foreign *poste restante*, which Margot had given as her direction, remained long unanswered, and the reply when it arrived struck the mother with consternation.

'You ask me to come back,' wrote Margot, 'after all I have done, and all it has ended in! I will *never* come back—I could not! If I touched that money, if I shared in the enjoyment of it in any way, I should feel I was taking the price of their lives, which I helped to throw away. It is different for you and the others—but for *me*! Oh, don't you understand that I could never do it now—it would be too horrible! Write to me to the addresses I will send you—tell me everything, every little thing about all of you, only don't try to make me change my mind—don't try to trace me or even to know what I am doing. It is enough that I am no unhappier than I ought to be, and far, far better treated than I deserve.'

'Poor dear child!' sighed her mother, 'she takes such a very high-flown view of it—so absurd now, too, when she might come back and no one would say a word against her! She always was so headstrong. But, never mind, she can't go on feeling like that, that's one comfort. I wish I knew whom she was with—she is probably in a situation of some kind, and she will soon get tired of that, thank goodness! I must leave her to herself a little; she will come home all the sooner!'

But week followed week, and Mrs. Chadwick's anticipations were not fulfilled. Margot's brief notes contained no hint of any slackening in her resolution. She did not return.

CHAPTER XII.

NUGENT UNDERSTANDS AT LAST.

Faithful she is, but she forsakes ;
And fond, yet endless woe she makes :
And fair ! but with this curse she's cross'd
To know her not till she is lost !

George Meredith.

MILLCENT's letter was delivered safely enough at Nugent's rooms, but it lay there unopened till long afterwards. He found that he could not stay in London—he could not bear his chambers in Lincoln's Inn—the contrast between his present state of mind and that in which he had last sat there was too sharp to be borne as yet ; every object his hand touched or his eye fell upon held a sting of happier recollection.

He wandered past the streets and squares around the Park ; the silent thoroughfares, the blank house-fronts, with their drawn blinds and window boxes where the past season's flowers were dying untended, were more than depressing to him just then. On the night after his return he had made a dreary pilgrimage across the Park to Albert Hall Mansions ; there, beyond the glass roof, were the coloured fires, the silvery haze of electric light, the music, the crowd, just as on that evening last July. He looked up at the dark mass of buildings behind him, and saw, dim against the moonless sky, the balcony where he had stood with Margot, and all her strange wayward beauty, the sweetness and surprise of her sudden capitulation, the touch of sadness—superstitious it had seemed then—when the brilliancy of the scene below had vanished and the bell clanged in the gloom, all this came back to his sick mind. Now he knew what reason she had had for foreboding, with a conscience burdened by the sin of that betrayal, her happiness—for assuredly she had been happy—poisoned by the knowledge that she had won his love by a lie. Why, knowing her as he did now, could he not be content at his deliverance—why could he not forget ?

He determined to try what change could do for him : he would escape from all these memories, and Norway seeming just then as good a place as any other, he started next day for Christiania. It was the old story of *cælum non animum*, though, for a time, the novelty and picturesqueness of fjord and peak and cataract, the sport—for he was a keen fisherman—the primitive villages, the quaint, kindly simplicity of their inhabitants, acted as anodynes or distractions.

But, with familiarity, this effect passed off, and Margot's face began to haunt him with more and more persistency. He saw her now as she had looked at their final parting, when she had rejected his entreaty that she would let him take her from that house of strife. With what a strange, calm dignity she had spoken! How came it, he wondered, that after all her misdeeds she still had the art of making others seem in the wrong? She deserved that he should despise her, that he should think no more of her, except as an illusion he had once held for the fair reality; but he longed for her, yearned for her still, with a yearning that would not be stifled. He had ordered no letters to be forwarded, though he wrote to Millicent occasionally. In his letters to her he made no allusion to Margot or the past, and she, regarding his silence as a token that her mediation had failed, was silent too. But one of her letters told him of the deaths of Allen and his father, and the news produced a reaction in Orme's mind against Margot.

It was owing to her that he felt a personal share in the responsibility for Allen's fate. But for the lie she had told him, he would have been gentler that night when they had met at the station; he would not have allowed him to break away without more than a half-hearted protest. She had made an accomplice of him after all! Now she was triumphant, he pictured her fair and tranquil and proud as ever, with the end she had striven for accomplished just when all had seemed lost. Yes, he could hate her now, but to hate was a greater misery than to love.

He came back unrested, unhealed, and when he got to his rooms one murky evening in October, there was a pile of letters on his table, which he opened and read one by one without curiosity or interest. One, in Millicent's handwriting he left, brother-like, to the last; this one was the letter she had written on the night of Ida's confession.

As he read it, his first emotion was a mighty overpowering joy. The wrong she had done had been done in ignorance; she was innocent of all that had seemed so diabolical, so monstrous, in its unscrupulousness. It was all a tragedy of errors. What she had told him about Allen she had honestly believed—what she had done afterwards was in a desperate, mistaken effort to save others, to postpone action until she knew whether her worst fears were true or not. And after the joy came hot shame, poignant remorse for having doubted her this second time, for not clinging—in the teeth of all evidence, all appearances—to the instinct which, though too faintly, had whispered that she of all women in the world was the last to do this thing. Would she ever pardon him this second disloyalty?—would she be generous enough to recognise that her own silence, her compromising speech and conduct, had all helped to keep him in his error?—would she remember that he had at least offered to remain by her through it all?

He could not tell; but he felt that, if she loved him still, she would forgive him even this, and he determined to lose no more

time; he would go down to Gorsecombe next day, and see whether his love's heart was hardened against him.

Unfortunately he had still to finish his letter, and the end contained the news of Margot's flight on the day of his own departure, and the absence of all trace of her since. The next morning his anxiety was in some measure relieved by another letter from Millicent, from which he learnt that Mrs. Chadwick had heard from her daughter, who was understood to be abroad and not expected to return for some time.

This did not prevent him from going down to Gorsecombe, and, on his arrival, he went up to Agra House and had an interview with Mrs. Chadwick, whom he found in mourning as little unbecoming or obtrusively inconsolable as a widow's weeds can be.

She met his appeal for any information respecting Margot with fluent evasiveness: she really could tell him nothing. Dear Margot was travelling with friends, her movements depended on them, and were so very uncertain.

'But you write to her,' he said; 'you surely must know where a letter will find her!'

'It is very painful for me to have to tell you,' said Mrs. Chadwick, 'but the truth is that I have ceased to have any communications with her for some time. Of course I have satisfied myself that she is under proper care—she is acting (this is in the *strictest* confidence, remember—I wouldn't have it known in Gorsecombe for the world!)—but she is acting as travelling companion to a lady—she prefers that and dependence to living at home under her mother's roof! She persists in refusing to come home. So at last I told her plainly that I must decline to encourage such folly by keeping up any correspondence with her until she tells me she is ready to come back and behave sensibly. I have not heard from her since—and you can imagine what a trial it all is for a mother.'

Nugent thought he knew the reason of Margot's determination: he wondered afterwards how much, if anything, Mrs. Chadwick knew of the secret history of the tragedy, but it was impossible to guess from her manner.

'At least,' he pleaded, 'you can give me the address to which you last wrote?'

Mrs. Chadwick hesitated before replying in her most engaging tones. 'Really, dear Mr. Orme, I don't see what good it would be if I did; it would be very unlikely for any letter written there to reach her now. But I am afraid I must refuse to give you even so much help as that. You see, it is not as if you were anything to one another now. I don't know which of you was responsible for breaking off your engagement, but I have no reason in the least to believe that she has changed her mind since—if you have. Mr. Orme,' she said—and there was really a ring of greater sincerity in her voice—'I do want her to be left alone at present; if she is worried with appeals or messages, if she thinks anyone is trying to find her out, we shall lose her altogether; promise me that you

will leave her to herself, that you will not persecute her! Indeed I believe that you will do yourself no good, and you may do her and us much harm.'

Orme had a bitter consciousness that this was true, that he had lost the right of approaching her now, even if he had the means; it was possible that her determination to remain away was partly inspired by the wish to avoid him.

He made no further attempt to trace her; he must leave it to time to decide whether they were to meet again, and what would come of it. In his heart he cherished a hope that proud, high-spirited Margot would not be able to endure dependence long—that when her patience broke down she would recognise that she had no other place but home to go to for shelter. But this hope, after sustaining him through the winter, grew fainter and fainter when spring came and summer was at hand, and still there were no tidings of Margot.

It was Whitsuntide again; Orme had not seen his home since Christmas, and now the warm May sunshine, the budding trees, the pink and white almond blossom in the Park stirred in him a languid impulse to see Gorsecombe once more in the freshness of early summer. Perhaps this time all the painful associations would have grown fainter; he might even hear news of her who still was seldom out of his thoughts for very long.

And so he was sitting once more at luncheon in the pretty shabby Vicarage dining-room, with the green venetian blinds half let down and the warm breeze stealing in through the open windows. He had only just arrived, his father and mother and Millicent were all there, and the conversation had been mostly carried on by the Vicar, who could talk about nothing just then but the conduct of the Rector of a neighbouring village in instituting proceedings against a farmer churchwarden for brawling in church, the 'brawling' consisting in leaving the building pointedly during a part of the service he objected to. 'It's a great pity,' he said; 'do so much harm about here, with the strong feeling there is against tithes; it will be a mercy if it does not drive many to Dissent! I can't think why Tancred hasn't more tact than to provoke his parishioners like this! I never find any difficulty in getting on with mine. Stick to the Rubric and they can't give you any trouble—that has always been *my* rule, and I've never had any unpleasantness with the Bishop as yet.'

So he talked on, asking Nugent, whose knowledge of ecclesiastical law was not exactly profound, for his opinion on the legal aspect of the case. Nugent answered as satisfactorily as he could, though his thoughts were elsewhere; there were questions he was longing to ask and yet dared not.

At last, when the Rev. Mr. Tancred was exhausted as a topic, Mrs. Orme said to Millicent, 'I suppose, Millie, when you were in the village this morning, you didn't happen to see anything of Margot?'

Her daughter's face warned her too late that she had been indiscreet.

'No, mamma,' said Millicent. 'I saw Miss Momber at Canister's, and she asked me to tell you that there is a poor family in one of those cottages on the Duckford Road, just before you turn to go off to——'

'Is Margot back?' Nugent interrupted, doubting whether he could have heard aright. 'Surely, mother said Margot——?'

'Yes, yes,' said Millicent nervously; 'she—she only came back last night—I have not seen her at all yet.'

'She has not come home from—from illness, or anything of that kind, has she?' demanded Nugent.

'No—at least,' said Millicent, 'I have not heard. I don't know really, Nugent . . . Are you going out?' For he had risen.

'I want to—to take a look round the old place,' he said, with affected carelessness; 'and I may make one or two calls.'

'Were you thinking of going to Agra House?'

Orme was not in the habit of colouring, but there was an additional tinge in his cheeks as he answered: 'I shall probably go there—yes.'

'Wait a little—let me walk there with you,' she said. 'I only have my clothing accounts to go through and some flowers to take down to the church for the decorations.'

'Can't wait now,' he called, laughing, from outside; 'we'll have our walk afterwards.'

'But stop, Nugent—stop just a minute. I—I have something to tell you!'

But he was already outside, and waved his hand to her, smiling from the gate. 'Tell me afterwards,' he said, and was gone.

She returned to the dining-room rather disconsolate. 'He has gone up there—to see *her*,' she said sadly; 'he wouldn't stay to listen.'

'I quite thought he was cured,' said her mother, 'or I shouldn't have mentioned her name as I did.'

'I wish he was!' said Millicent; 'and now it will come on him quite suddenly, with no preparation. Poor Nugent!'

'Well, well,' said the Vicar philosophically, 'you've been spared an unthankful task, my dear Millie; you know what Shakespeare makes Cleopatra say:

Though it be honest, it is never good
To bring bad news: give to a gracious message
An host of tongues; but let ill tidings tell
Themselves, when they be felt.

He must hear it sometime, and the sooner in these matters the better. I was hoping he'd got over it too, poor boy, I certainly thought they parted by mutual consent. Ah, well! lovers ought to know their own minds. Did you send round to let Fanshawe know I can't take the evening service to night—no? He'll be away

at cricket, or up at Holly Lodge with his lady-love, if you don't make haste ; there, I suppose I shall have to go myself !'

Orme could not have borne any companionship just then : he wanted to be alone, to think over this great happiness that had come to him. Margot was back at Gorsecombe—he might see her that very day !

Yet he did not go up to Agra House at once, it was early even in the country for an afternoon call, and he wanted to collect his thoughts, to enjoy this period of anticipation to the full ; he had begun to hope again—if she had come back, did not that prove that it was not he who had kept her away ?

He walked through the village and along the open roads, finding joy in everything now, in the contrast of the tinted snow of the apple-orchards against the deep blue sky, in the scent of the hawthorn and the aromatic fir-branches, in the mellow impudent notes of the blackbird, the distant call of the cuckoo. All about him Nature was unfolding, renewing, awakening. How could he help seeing in this a type of his own fortunes—a sign that the winter in his heart and life was gone and summer had come back ?

Then he came back by the lanes, in which the pink campion and wild hyacinth had almost ousted the last primroses from the banks, and soon he reached the little gate, where Margot had waited for him that last day he had seen her.

The net was up, he saw as he passed the tennis-lawn, and a man in flannels rose from one of the chairs as he approached. He made a movement as if about to hold out his hand, and then seemed aware that he was not recognised.

'You don't remember me, I see,' he said, with a smile.

'I can't say I do at this moment,' said Orme ; 'I am so little at Gorsecombe now.'

'It was in town we met—not down here,' said the other, still smiling, though a little uncomfortably, as if he felt the embarrassment of having to recall himself to Nugent's mind. 'Have you forgotten a certain evening last summer, at Albert Hall Mansions ?'

'At Mrs. Antrobus's !' cried Orme, starting. 'To be sure ! I beg your pardon—I remember you perfectly now—your name is Langrish.'

It was Langrish ; the man with the weary eyes and the listless manner, whom he had met on the night he had won Margot, and to whom he had never once given a thought since. There were other excuses than this, and the difference between evening clothes and tennis flannels, for his failure to recognise him at once. Langrish had altered greatly since then, and the change was an improvement ; he looked a younger and a stronger man than Orme had taken him to be on their first meeting ; his eyes had lost that faded look, his whole bearing was brighter and more alert.

'You were going to the house ?' he said ; 'I'll walk up with you.'

Orme felt an uneasiness too slight to deserve the name of jealousy, yet containing its germs; till now it had not occurred to him that he might have rivalry to contend against as well as alienation—but what could this man want here, unless he came as a lover?

‘You are staying here, I suppose?’ he said, rather suspiciously.

‘For a few days only,’ answered Langrish with cheerful carelessness; ‘my leave is up, you see, and I am anxious to get back as soon as I can.’

This did not sound very lover-like. ‘You want to get back?—to Yokohama—it was Yokohama, I think?’

‘It was—and is,’ said Langrish. ‘Oh, yes, I don’t mind it now, you know. I’m taking my wife out with me.’

His wife!—he was married then, and going away in a few days—what absurdities jealousy leads a man into! The reaction made Orme quite cordial.

‘Of course,’ he said, ‘that makes all the difference. And you must let me offer my very best wishes. I’m afraid I shall not have the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Langrish before you sail, unless,’ he added, ‘she is staying here with you?’

‘You are very kind,’ said Langrish, with some stiffness. ‘My wife is here, of course, and you will find her in the house somewhere. If you would like to see her, I am sure she will be equally pleased to see you. I thought possibly you might have come up with that intention.’

Nugent murmured something polite; Langrish’s assumption that he had come up to Agra House solely to make his wife’s acquaintance rather tickled him—it was so like the egotism of a newly-married man!

As they entered the hall Reggie and Lettice came running out. The boy, without noticing Nugent, seized upon Langrish. ‘I say, you aren’t coming in now? not when you said you’d play a single with me this afternoon, and I’ve got the bats out and everything; I want to see which of us two plays best—I expect we’re about equal.’

Langrish laughed very pleasantly and good-humouredly. ‘All right, old fellow,’ he said, ‘I’ll have a set with you, if you like; you must make allowances for my advanced years, you know—I can’t run about like you.’

‘What bosh!’ said Reggie. ‘You’re as young as *he* is. Come along!’

They disappeared towards the tennis ground, leaving Lettice and Nugent alone in the hall together. ‘Come into the school-room, Nugent, do,’ said Lettice, ‘I’ve got lots to tell you; I’ve got a new governess, and I think she’s lovely—only Reggie will say she’s bunny-mouthed; she’s away now, so you can’t see her . . . Oh, and I want to show you my new drawings. I’ve been doing some illustrations to Homer—the “Stories from Homer,” you know. Some of those I’ve done are *very* good. Only I don’t draw

helmets nicely, so I've had to put them on ordinary hats. Should you think that mattered? . . . Oh, Kitty, I've forgotten all about you! Look, Nugent, doesn't she make a dear little doll? I dressed her up in my doll's things, but she will *not* keep her tail down—she's in black, you see, because all the dolls went into mourning for poor Allen and father. It's nearly time for them to be in half-mourning now.'

There was a shade of gravity on her face as she spoke Allen's name. 'Poor Allen!' she said softly; 'perhaps if he had stayed here that night instead of going away again, he wouldn't have died. He gave me a letter, and told me to tear it up, Nugent, and Margot cried. I wasn't to tell—but I may tell you. Margot said I might last night.'

The tearing up of the letter had been unexplained for him till now, and of this, too, she was innocent! He could hardly master his voice for the emotion that came over him. So Margot had wished him to know—then there was hope!

'Lettie,' he said, 'I want to see Margot alone—will you help me—will you run and tell her that I am here, and ask her in kindness to come to me?'

'I thought you and Margot weren't friends any more?'

'I hope we are. I—I want to know what we are to be, dear.'

'Because Margot is only here for a very little while. Oh, Nugent, *can* you get her to stay? Do. I have tried so hard, but she says she must go quite away!'

'If I can help it, Lettice, she shall not go. Now run, like a good child, and ask her to see me.'

'All right,' said Lettice. 'Where shall I tell her you will be? There's nobody in the drawing-room—I should wait there if I were you. Would you like to take Kitty to amuse you in case Margot is a long time? I can spare her.'

Orme declined this hospitable offer, and Lettice skimmed upstairs in search of Margot.

He could not sit still in the shaded drawing-room; he rose and wandered restlessly about, and at length stepped into the conservatory, where the heavy exotic atmosphere seemed charged with the poetry and mystery of love. Would she come? . . . A light step behind him, a delicate sound of drapery; he turned, and all the blood rushed back to his heart—he saw her once again!

She was in black, which at first sight gave her a fairer and more girlish look, but in her eyes there was the shadow of an ineffaceable pain: the lines of her face were sharper, the paleness of her cheeks had lost its former creamy tint, her hand, too, as he took it, felt frail and unsubstantial in his. She met him with a wistful hesitation, no longer carrying her head erect, as he remembered it of old.

'I saw you coming,' she said; 'I hoped you would not go away without seeing me.'

'What else did I come for?' he said. 'Margot, I—I have heard everything!'

'You have heard? you will not reproach me now, when I cannot listen to you . . . What I did was for the best!'

'I have done with reproaches for ever,' he said. 'I only come now to beg you to forgive me this once more. I ought to have believed in you through all—instead of taking it for granted, as I did, that you must be guilty.'

'That was not your fault,' she replied. 'I allowed you to think so.'

'But why? Could you not have trusted me?'

'You see,' she said, 'I knew so little myself—I was afraid to speak of it, to think what it might mean—I wanted to keep the secret from everyone, till I could know more, till I could see the persons I suspected and warn them. Yet I nearly did tell you.'

'If you had!' he cried—'if you only had!'

'Shall I tell you what kept me back? I felt that you would blame me almost as much, if you knew, for treating him as I had done—for letting him go away that second time. I was afraid of what you would say. And then, when that woman brought the letter, I saw that—in spite of yourself—you believed her—that, even if I spoke, you would not believe me. That kept me silent, Nugent!'

'I did not deserve to be trusted, I suppose,' he said, 'but I have suffered for it too. Is it not time to let those terrible days be forgotten? Can you not forgive me, even this second and worst failure?'

'What should I be if I could not—if I felt I had any offence to forgive you for?—I, who can never be forgiven now in this world! You must not think I have forgotten what I have done—that I ever shall forget. I have sinned too deeply—the consequences have been too dreadful for that. I have not come home here to live. I should feel that I dare not hope to be happy in this house. But I could not go away without seeing them all for the last time! Could I?'

'Margot!' he cried, 'why must you go away—from England, I mean? Now, when we understand one another! . . . Have some pity on me!—don't leave me again!'

She drew back, horror and bewilderment in her eyes :

'Is it you that speak such words to me as that—now?' she said. 'I thought you an honourable man, Nugent!'

'What have I said? What can there be dishonourable in a renewal of our engagement?'

'Ah!' she cried, 'you said you knew all—and I thought you meant . . . Can't you understand that—that I am not free!'

'Margot, for God's sake don't keep me in the dark like this! Not free? Does that mean that I am too late—that you are engaged?'

'Did he not tell you—just now—when you were talking together?'

'He? Mr. Langrish! How can that be, when he is married?'

'I am his wife.'

The events which had contributed to such a result must be told here for the reader's instruction, though Margot could not be expected to give such an explanation to Nugent Orme.

Briefly, then, her history had been as follows: She had waited at the hospital on the morning of Allen's death, until she could bear it no longer. She had her jewellery with her, and a slender stock of money; her great desire was to leave the country, to go far away somewhere; she would go as nurse, lady's maid, governess—anything. Then she remembered that references would certainly be asked for—and what references could she give? Suddenly Mrs. Maberly came back to her mind, and her troubles with companions. There was just a faint hope that she might be still in town, that she might not have engaged anyone; she would go to the Langham before she went anywhere else. Mrs. Maberly by a fortunate chance had not left the hotel, and was still in search of the ideal travelling-companion, so when she learnt that the lovely Miss Chevening was leaving home for family reasons, and willing to go abroad with her in any capacity, she was overjoyed.

They left for Paris next day, and for some time Margot had nothing to complain of, though the friend began to merge by slow degrees in the patroness. There were causes enough to prevent Margot from being the lively and interested companion Mrs. Maberly considered she had a right to expect. The news of Chadwick's sudden death came as a fresh blow during her travels, and, though she struggled to do her duty and submit to all the whims and caprices of her employer, her powers were not equal to more.

By-and-by Langrish joined them, and the interest he had felt on first meeting her was heightened now by finding her acting as companion to his sister. He treated her with the utmost tact and delicacy, shielding her in countless ways from his sister's ill-humour; he saw that she was unhappy, and scrupulously refrained from betraying his own feelings. Insensibly she grew to like him, to regard him as a friend, with which, not imagining that he could be more to her, he appeared for the time content.

However, one day he had found her in despair; his sister, being in a more than usually bad temper, had informed Miss Chevening that her services were dispensed with. Margot had no money—all her resources had gone in providing the necessary equipment in Paris; she would not return home—yet, where was she to go?

Then Langrish assured her that she need not fear that his sister would turn her adrift in the world—he would see that she did not go back to England without a suitable escort, if she must go. The fear of losing her altogether made him break a resolution he had made not to avail himself of their relative positions; he told her what a difference she had made in his life, and how, though he ought not to speak, and knew perfectly well he could be nothing to her, yet he could not help himself. If she was not free—if what

he hoped could not be, she had only to tell him so, and forget that he had ever spoken.

Margot was in a state to be grateful for all kindnesses; her pride had been brought very low; she had learnt a stern lesson against undervaluing her fellow-creatures; not to mention that Langrish was not personally distasteful to her. She did not actually consent then—what had passed was too terrible and too recent—but she had sufficient confidence in him to tell him all that oppressed her, and made her in her own opinion unworthy of a good man's love. He did not take a very harsh view of it, though he said no more of his suit at the time; the breach with Mrs. Maberly was healed by his instrumentality, and matters went on much as before till the tour was nearly over, and then, once more, he returned to the question. He must return to Japan very shortly. Could she give him her answer before he went?

This time she consented; she had no love to give, but, since he was good enough to care for her, she would try to make one life happier, as some halting atonement for those she had spoilt.

So far she had not regretted; what had been in its inception mere gratitude and liking was growing into a warmer feeling; there were times when she had a guilty conviction that her lot was easier than she had merited, and that the burden she had imposed on herself as some palliative to an ever-present remorse was growing lighter rather than heavier with time.

To return to the couple we have left: Orme stood staring stupidly down on the red tiles of the floor, trying to force his mind to take in the terrible truth he had just learnt. It was so far beyond the very worst he could have anticipated, that, even now, he had a lingering hope that there might be some mistake.

'His wife!' he echoed. 'You are his wife?'

Through the open panes in the roof the words, 'Vantage to me!' came in Langrish's voice from the distant tennis-ground, like a mocking and triumphant comment on the situation.

'Indeed, I thought you knew,' repeated Margot piteously; 'I saw you speaking to him on the lawn just now.'

All the incidents of that brief conversation came back to him now in their real meaning—his instinctive jealousy, and the fact that it had been appeased by what was, if he had known it, the death-blow of all his hopes, the touch of ghastly comedy in his unconscious congratulations to the rival who had supplanted him.

'No,' he said drearily; 'I had no suspicion till now. I—I suppose I ought to say something quite safe and commonplace—regret my mistake—wish you every happiness . . . Well, I can't—not just yet . . . Margot,' he broke out passionately, 'how could you do this thing? What were *his* claims to mine? You belonged to me! You had no right—I say, no *right*—to leave me for another!'

'I—I hoped you would not have cared like this,' she answered

in a low voice; 'I am not worth your caring for. But you must not speak as if I had been untrue to you—as if I had left you. There was a time, when you first knew of that letter, when you yourself were the first to see that we must part. Yes—yes, I know that afterwards, when the blow fell, you offered to renew the engagement—it was generous of you—I felt that at the time—I feel it still—but it came too late, Nugent!'

'It was not too late, then,' he said; '*you* have made it too late! You could not have patience even this little while—you were in such a violent hurry to throw away your life and mine! And why, Margot? Out of pique—for some fantastic scruple—for revenge? God knows . . . it is beyond me!'

She drew herself up haughtily; for all her new-born humility, there was a flash of anger in her hazel eyes.

'You force me to speak plainly when you use such words,' she said. 'What I did was neither in pique nor revenge. I threw away nothing—you lost nothing—by my marriage. In no case—Nugent, you must understand me—in *no* case, could our two lives ever have come together again. The love I had for you died when I knew that you had no real faith in me, that you did not love me as I had once thought to be loved. How another woman would have felt, I don't know—but when I saw that, I ceased to value your love. I found that my own was not the same. Think how it would have been, if I had told you all, and you had believed me; you would have found excuses for me for a time—and then, by-and-by, your reason would speak again, and you would condemn me for all the harm I did. Or you would have doubted, in spite of yourself, whether, after all, I had not deceived you; whether I had not been more guilty than I would admit. No, I could not be content with such love; without confidence, without respect, a love from which doubt would never be far away. I could not have lived under a love like that—we should have been miserable, Nugent. It is cruel of me to say all this now?—I hope not—I do not mean to be. Some day, perhaps, you will see that I was right, and be glad that I drew back in time.'

'That day will never come for me—no, not if I could live on for centuries!' he said; 'but that will not matter to you . . . Well, there is no more to be said. I have lost you this time, for good and all, and I have no right to complain. What you have just told me is the bitterest blow of all, but I brought that, too, on myself. Forget what I was fool and coxcomb enough to say just now—a man cannot always count his words at first. I have come to my senses now. I don't pretend I am resigned, or ever shall be resigned, on my own account—but on yours, I think even now I am man enough to feel that it is well that you have chosen what is best. Dear, I do sincerely, earnestly, wish you all happiness now and always!'

'Happiness!' she repeated; 'that is too large a word for me now. But I shall always like to think that you were able to wish it for me, that we part as friends.'

She held out her hand, he took it without another word of farewell, and the next minute he had gone, he hardly knew how, from the house, avoiding all notice, in haste to reach some kindly solitude, some sheltered spot where he would be face to face with his grief.

The last word had been spoken: he had won the heart of his beautiful, self-willed, erring love, but he had not known how to keep it, and now all hope of regaining it must end! As surely as if the future had been unfolded before his eyes, did he know that he would look upon Margot's face and hear her voice never again! And, in the first agony of that knowledge and all it implied, he envied the fate of Allen Chadwick, the poor despised outcast, whom she had never loved, never even liked, but who had at least been privileged to die for her!

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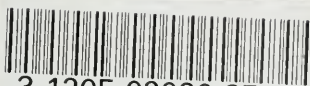




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